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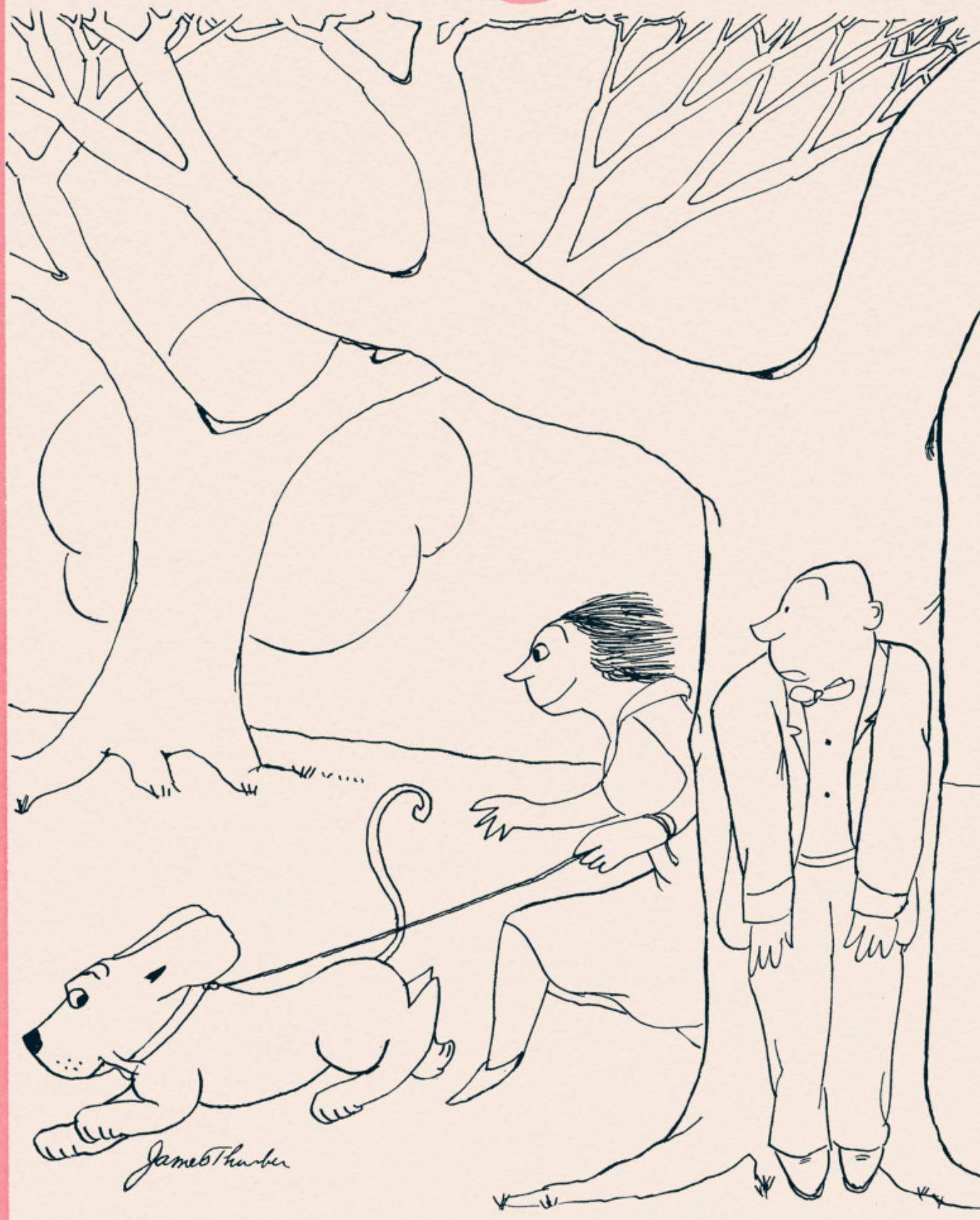
THE NEW YORKER

Sept. 4, 2023



Presidio #5, 2023, 26 x 22 inches, oil on canvas. © 2023 Mitchell Johnson.

Mitchell Johnson

Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill will host an exhibit of California artist, Mitchell Johnson, September 6–17, 2023. Donald Kuspit recently reviewed Johnson's work in *WhiteHot Magazine* discussing the painting, *Presidio #5*:

"The contrast of forms and colors—objects oddly de-objectified by being given formal and expressive presence—with the exception of the descriptively objective rooftop, a kind of repoussoir device by which the space is measured—is an aesthetic triumph by way of its integration of incommensurate forms and colors. Kandinsky argued that it was hard to convincingly integrate red and blue—especially Johnson's subtle gestural blue and blatantly solid red, but Johnson deftly does so by implying that the spontaneous flow of the blue water, more or less straight linear gestures, has an affinity with the compact curves of the red rooftops."

More info at www.mitchelljohnson.com. Request an exhibit catalog by email: mitchell.catalog@gmail.com. Follow on instagram: @mitchell_johnson_artist.

THE NEW YORKER
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AN ARCHIVAL ISSUE

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CONTRIBUTORS

David Grann (*"The Squid Hunter," p. 34*), a staff writer, is the author of "Killers of the Flower Moon" and, most recently, "The Wager."

Patricia Marx (*"Pets Allowed," p. 28*) is a staff writer. She published "You Can Only Yell at Me for One Thing at a Time," with Roz Chast, in 2020.

Saul Steinberg (*Sketchbook, p. 53*) contributed covers and drawings to *The New Yorker* for nearly six decades. He died in 1999.

Larissa MacFarquhar (*Books, p. 65*), a staff writer at the magazine since 1998, is the author of "Strangers Drowning."

Edmund Wilson (*Books, p. 69*), who died in 1972, was a longtime book critic and essayist for the magazine.

Laurie Colwin (*The Talk of the Town, p. 13*), a fiction writer and a food writer, died in 1992. Her complete fiction works, including "Happy All the Time" and "Family Happiness," were reissued in 2021.

Susan Orlean (*"Little Wing," p. 48*) is a staff writer. She is the author of, most recently, "On Animals."

Vladimir Nabokov (*"Butterflies," p. 16*), who died in 1977, contributed to the magazine from 1942 to 1976. His books include "Lolita," "Pnin," and "Speak, Memory."

Mary Oliver (*Poem, p. 40*) won a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award for her poetry. A volume of selected poems, "Devotions," was published in 2017. She died in 2019.

John Lahr (*The Theatre, p. 70*), a staff writer, has contributed to *The New Yorker* since 1991. He was the magazine's senior drama critic for twenty-one years.

Emily Hahn (*The Talk of the Town, p. 12*), who died in 1997, published fifty-four books and wrote more than two hundred articles for the magazine.

James Thurber (*Cover*), who died in 1961, was a cartoonist, a writer, a journalist, and a playwright. This art work ran as the cover of the February 29, 1936, issue.

Haruki Murakami (*Fiction, p. 56*) has published more than a dozen novels, including "1Q84" and "Norwegian Wood." His latest book is "Novelist as a Vocation."

Noah Baumbach (*Shouts & Murmurs, p. 27*), a director and screenwriter, most recently worked on the films "Barbie," "White Noise," and "Marriage Story."

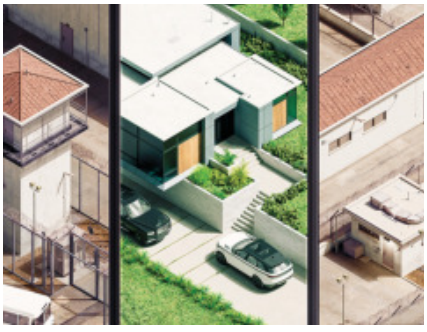
Jamaica Kincaid (*The Talk of the Town, p. 11*) has written numerous books, including "A Small Place" and "My Brother." She is a professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade (*Poem, p. 51*), a Brazilian poet and writer, died in 1987. His work has been translated widely, with English versions by Mark Strand and by Elizabeth Bishop.

Joseph Mitchell (*"Harboring Rats," p. 20*), who died in 1996, began writing for the magazine in 1933.

Nick Paumgarten (*The Talk of the Town, p. 15*), a staff writer since 2005, has contributed to the magazine since 2000.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



LETTER FROM THE SOUTH
Charles Bethea reports on Arthur Cofield, Jr., a Georgia prisoner who stole millions from billionaires.

NOVELLAS
In "Server," by Bryan Washington, an English teacher in Japan has a ghostly encounter in a video game.

ESSAY
Keith Gessen considers the case for negotiating with Russia in order to stop the war in Ukraine.

Download the New Yorker app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week's magazine and all issues back to 2008.

LEFT TO RIGHT: MAX GUTHER, AARON FERNANDEZ, RICARDO TOMÁS

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GOINGS ON

AUGUST 30 – SEPTEMBER 5, 2023

What we're watching, listening to, and doing this week.

Surrealism is alive and well and getting better all the time in **"Heji Shin: The Big Nudes,"** a wonderful show at 52 Walker, through Oct. 7, that's not just about its subjects—brain scans, a pig (a detail of "Reclining Nude," from 2023, is pictured here)—but about photography itself. Working from a palette that includes Irving Penn grays and calling to mind body-scan photography by artists like Kurt Hoerbst, Shin shows and tells what makes a sensibility. The forty-seven-year-old German balances the often self-serious "art" photography of the past fifty years or so (the exhibition's title refers to the late Helmut Newton's large-format series of big nude women) with an outstanding sense of humor that takes the piss out of the concept of the nude. Are pigs naked? Are they showing us their emotions? And are emotions a landscape that a brain scan can convey? These are among the many questions raised by the very distinctive artist.—*Hilton Als*

© HEJI SHIN / COURTESY THE ARTIST AND 52 WALKER

ABOUT TOWN

OFF BROADWAY | **"Pay the Writer,"** a world-première play by Tawni O'Dell, is a love story, but not the usual sort. The celebrated Black novelist Cyrus Holt is in a controlling relationship—with his work. All his other relationships, including those with his first and most beloved wife, with his gay best friend slash literary agent, and with his two children, have engendered various levels of resentment over the years. Those years are now ending, and a crusty but caring Cyrus wants to reconcile. O'Dell and the director, Karen Carpenter, throw one emotional punch after another; most of them land, but the barrage may leave you reeling. Thankfully, a talented cast, particularly Bryan Batt ("Mad Men"), as Holt's agent, is there to prop you up.—*Dan Stahl (Pershing Square Signature Center; through Sept. 30.)*

PODCAST | In 2020, Vann R. Newkirk II and *The Atlantic* (where Newkirk is a senior editor) released "Floodlines," a majestic, artfully produced, Peabody-winning podcast series about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath in New Orleans. With similar sensitivity, finesse, and attention to exacting detail, this year's ambitious **"Holy Week: The Story of a Revolution Undone"** chronicles the tumultuous period of agony and uprisings that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968. The show skillfully weaves together original reporting by Newkirk with vivid archival audio and sophisticated sound design to tell the stories of families, activists, and politicians in Washington, D.C., and beyond. We follow some of their struggles to cope and to find faith during a historic moment that's often overlooked—and that reveals much about our own time.—*Sarah Larson*

FOLK MUSIC | The folksinger and songwriter **Iris DeMent** has long written from a place of immediacy. Since "Let the Mystery Be," the opener to her début record, "Infamous Angel," from 1992, her searching, spiritual approach to roots music has often focussed on the people trying to get by day to day in life along the Bible Belt. DeMent's most recent album, "Workin' on a World"—her first in nearly eight years, released this past February—continued an activist streak that began in the nineties with such songs as "Wasteland of the Free." Her piano-driven Americana music of protest builds vignettes around civil-rights icons, satirizes politicians playing right-wing messiah, and invokes the gospel great Mahalia Jackson. With her spindly voice certain and her lyrics sharp, she has rarely sounded more present.—*Sheldon Pearce (City Winery; Sept. 2.)*

ART | "My Beating Heart / Mi corazón latiente" presents five of **Pepón Osorio's** large-scale installations, ornately constructed scenes depicting Latinx life in America. The artist, a visionary maximalist, is also a deft choreographer of the eye, moving it precisely, wildly, across dense thickets of worldly stuff, underscoring the distinctions between decoration (personal, expressive) and artifice (protective, deflective). Osorio's subjects are also his collaborators, their recorded voices resounding in the spaces he creates for them. "Badge of Honor," from 1995, is one of the show's revelations, featuring video conversations between an incarcerated father and his teen-age son projected inside a constructed prison cell and bedroom. When the sight of Osorio's work overwhelms, then close your eyes, and listen.—*Jennifer Krasinski (New Museum; through Sept. 17.)*

MOVIES | A highlight of the series "Korean Cinema's Golden Decade: The 1960s," playing Sept. 1-17, at Film at Lincoln Center, is the vigorous and bitter film noir **"Aimless Bullet,"** from 1960, directed by Yu Hyun-mok, which offers such a grim view of life in Seoul that it was banned by the government. It revolves around one extended family living in ramshackle housing—a junior accountant whose meagre salary barely supports his mentally ill mother, his pregnant wife, his young daughter, and his unemployed veteran brother, and leaves him unable to pay for dental work to relieve a relentless toothache. With jobs scarce and romance thwarted by poverty, war-related disability, and general despair, crime becomes an irresistible temptation, and the movie's climactic violence takes many forms, each more nihilistic than the last.—*Richard Brody*

TABLES FOR TWO

Scarr's Pizza
35 Orchard St.

At eight-thirty on a recent Saturday night, the line for Scarr's Pizza, on the Lower East Side, ran up Orchard Street, rounded the corner, and ended in a churning knot of people wondering whether the wait would actually be worth it. All pizza is relative, New York pizza doubly so. A Scarr's slice is a legendary slice, an if-you-know-you-know slice. It's a slice that many people claim is the best in the city. I'll say this: Any list of great New York pizza that leaves off Scarr's shouldn't be trusted.

The slice is excellent, just this side of faultless. The crust is light and a little tangy, with a sturdy bottom that gives over almost immediately to a springy interior. The whole thing has admirable structural integrity, succumbing neither to sag nor to sog. The sauce is bright and fresh—it can land a little bit flat, but it's nothing that a hit of hot pepper can't perk up.

Scarr Pimentel opened his pizzeria in 2016, after apprenticing in some of the city's most storied pie shops. Pimentel, a Black Latino man making moves in the overwhelmingly white pizza world, was thoughtful about his creations: he used organic ingredients and eschewed pork products. When he couldn't figure out the right blend of flour for the crust of his dreams, he started milling his own.

In July, Pimentel relocated across the street. The new Scarr's is swankier, and more grown-up, though the vibe can be a little hard to pin down. Still, the slices are virtually the same as at the old shop—a thrill, and a relief. In the back, there's a spacious full-service restaurant, with a separate menu, including cocktails and a roster of classic dishes with a Scarrsian spin. The Caesar salad remains superlative, with a vegan dressing that has a bracing degree of funk and brine and, instead of traditional croutons, ultra-crisp fried bread crumbs. Appetizer portions of parm (eggplant, chicken, or meatball) could easily serve as entrées; the meatballs are soft as a sigh, though too gentle in flavor.

But the pizza is the point. The dining room offers smaller, more human-scale versions of the pies, with tall, puffy edges. The changed proportions make a difference. The Hotboi—beef pepperoni, jalapeño, and hot honey; arguably the signature Scarr's pie—is sharper and friskier in its smaller form. Whenever I've ordered a bronzed-bottomed square slice at the counter, I've wished I hadn't—it's always been a little dry and heavy. Ordering a square pie in the dining room, where they also come out smaller, as well as hotter, and ethereally light, I regretted nothing. The DJ Clark Kent, with chicken sausage and slices of fresh garlic, is a new candidate for my favorite Scarr's slice. Is it the best slice in New York? You've got to answer that for yourself. *(Slices start at $3.75, whole pies at $21.)*

—Helen Rosner

PHOTOGRAPH BY VICTOR LLORENTE FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN (TOP); GABE SCHNEIDER (BOTTOM)

PICK THREE

The staff writer Amanda Petrusich shares her current obsessions.

1. BEST TIME WATCHING PEOPLE CLEAN A BOAT: On Bravo's **"Below Deck"**—a reality series about the upstairs-downstairs travails of seasonal workers who tend to superyachts chartered by wealthy patrons—eighty per cent of the action involves scrubbing the boat, with occasional pauses for the crew to pick fights and make ill-considered romantic decisions. The latest season of the spinoff series "Below Deck Down Under" takes place near Australia's Great Barrier Reef, and stars a repurposed 1976 Japanese marine research vessel, commanded by a captain who once crashed a superyacht into a local marina.

2. BEST USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: With their record label Dust-to-Digital, Lance and April Ledbetter make obscure but magnificent recordings available to the public. The **Dust-to-Digital Instagram account** regularly features user-submitted videos of vernacular performances from around the world. A recent post contained clips of a young boy in Congo drumming on an empty water bottle and singing in a sweet, wee voice; a precise and boisterous step crew in Baytown, Texas; and a gorgeous accordion performance by Nicolás Gutiérrez, among other bright bits of humanity.

3. BEST WAY TO REMEMBER THE TACTILE PLEASURES OF PHYSICAL MEDIA: Before Justin Vernon assumed the nom de plume Bon Iver, he was a member of the tender folk-rock outfit DeYarmond Edison. **"Epoch,"** an enormous, startlingly comprehensive chronicle of the band's career (including remastered albums, CDs of live recordings, and a graceful book), is the sort of gorgeous boxed set that a person could spend years unpacking, both literally and figuratively.

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
OUR DUMB FRIENDS

When Susan Orlean was about five years old, she wrote and illustrated a book called "Herbert the Near-Sighted Pigeon." In her case, the early funny stuff led to the later funnier stuff. An obsession with members of the animal kingdom, domesticated and otherwise, has spurred her to write about pandas, snakes, show dogs, movie-star dogs, military mules, Moroccan donkeys, a woman in New Jersey who kept two dozen tigers, Orlean's own chickens and turkeys (who "follow me around like puppies"), the itinerant life of a whale celebrity named Keiko, and, once more and at length, pigeons. Susan Orlean is the kind of person who did not call the police when a boyfriend showed up at her apartment on Valentine's Day with a lion. Reader, she married him.

The New Yorker, in its ninety-eight-and-a-half-year history, has not exactly been run by animal people. From what we know of its longest-serving editor, William Shawn, a quiet and fastidious man, it is no easier to imagine him living with a yappy schnauzer than with a flock of pink flamingos. Harold Ross, the founder and first editor of the magazine, seemed almost to resent the devotion of so many of his writers to their animal companions. In the early days of this comic weekly, as Ross called it, James Thurber took a trip home to Columbus, Ohio, with a Scottish terrier named Jeannie. When Jeannie went missing, Thurber was beside himself, and he delayed his journey back to Babylon until she could be found. Returning to the office two days late, Thurber was confronted by an irate editor. "I understand you've overstayed your vacation to look for a dog," Ross growled. Thurber, as he recounted in his memoir "The Years with Ross," responded in kind: "I told him what to do with his goddam magazine, that I was through."

Like any editor worth his inkpot, Ross knew he'd better put things right, and Thurber went on filling these pages with bowsers for many years to come. "I am not a cat man, but a dog man," he once wrote. "All felines can tell this at a glance—a sharp, vindictive glance."

Dorothy Parker, Thurber's contemporary at the magazine, was also partial to dogs (one of her poodles was named Cliché), and she wrote about them with some regularity. But Parker, unlike Thurber, was open to the world's entire menagerie, worms to warthogs. "You can always tell that the crash is coming when I start getting tender about Our Dumb Friends," she wrote in "Just a Little One." "Three highballs, and I think I'm St. Francis of Assisi."

And so it goes. No small part of the history of *The New Yorker* involves its writers' and artists' fascination with animals: E. B. White's spiders, swans, and pigs; Joseph Mitchell's clams, oysters, and rats; Diane Ackerman's whales and golden monkeys; George Booth's frenzied house cats; Roz Chast's epigrammatic parrots; Sam Gross's dyspeptic frogs; Amy Hwang's very shy snails. (Horses are rare, at least in the visual realm, and generally unsuccessful: no one here, it seems, can draw a proper horse.)

To memorialize this multigenerational obsession, we bring you a modest, if highly eccentric, selection from our past near-century. Human beings tend to think that they are the only species with the capacity to tell stories. And yet many of our writers are tuned in to other frequencies. The failure to hear these frequencies, our writers seem to say, means simply that we aren't really listening. White, who was for years Ross's most dependable staffer, put it this way in "Charlotte's Web": "It is quite possible that an animal has spoken civilly to me and that I didn't catch the remark because I wasn't paying attention."

—David Remnick

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

APRIL 28, 1934
DEFENCE OF CATS

The other day the editor of a great newspaper decided that he ought to find out if dogs are better than cats, so he sent a man up to see Albert Payson Terhune, some of whose best friends have fur. It turned out that Mr. Terhune preferred dogs, feeling strongly about the whole thing.

Only women like cats, he said, and added disparagingly that this seemed to him "a very significant tip-off on the makeup of the two sexes." This was the place, of course, for the reporter to ask Mr. Terhune if he thought dogs were better than women, but apparently he forgot to. Anyway, Mr. Terhune said next that the only real friendships he had ever made with cats were with those that thought they were dogs and acted that way. For a moment this gave me quite a cheerful picture of Mr. Terhune and his cat friends hot on the scent, yelping and baying, but I imagine that the intent was a little more mystic than that, implying some subtle masculinity of the spirit, and I suppose we might as well let it go.

Finally, Mr. Terhune summed up his whole opinion of cats by calling them lazy, disloyal opportunists, with nothing to recommend them except a low mechanical cunning.

"Cats can do some marvellously intelligent things," Mr. Terhune admitted reluctantly. "They will learn by themselves to unlatch a door."

This seems to me not only an intelligent but almost a miraculous accomplishment, except in the case of an extremely tall cat, but in any case it is white of Mr. Terhune, and shows that at least he tries to keep an open mind.

I am inclined to resent his other statements, though, and would like to discuss them for a moment, with special reference to Dillinger, the cat who thinks she's Gloria Swanson.

In the first place, women do *not* like Dillinger, although she admires them passionately. There is something about a richly upholstered beauty which inspires in Dillinger a perfect frenzy of admiration and yearning. It is unfortunate that her love usually expresses itself in a frantic attempt to climb up their legs, but it is impossible not to admire her persistence in the face of repeated and often painful rebuffs. Nor, in spite of Mr. Terhune, is there anything mercenary in Dillinger's courtship. She wants nothing from these ladies, neither food nor affection. She loves only, I'm sure, the way they smell.

In another paragraph of that misguided interview, Mr. Terhune says, "A cat simply does not know what loyalty is. I have a warmer kitchen and more milk and liver. Your cat will gladly come to my kitchen and desert you." In the case of Dillinger, who wouldn't be found dead in any man's kitchen and undoubtedly imagines that liver and milk are the staples of a baser order—of dogs, perhaps—it is hard to apply Mr. Terhune's conditions, but I understand his point. It is perfectly true that Dillinger would leave me instantly for more caviar and thicker cream, for softer pillows and larger vistas, but there would be no disloyalty in that. Dillinger is an epicure, serenely removed from such soft and bourgeois considerations as loyalty and disloyalty, and her only anxiety in life is to better herself aesthetically. It seems to me that people like Mr. Terhune have wasted a great deal of sympathy on dogs that have starved to death in hovels rather than leave their masters. They are the socially inefficient, and they deserve what they get.

I think, though, that Mr. Terhune is most misguided when he talks about the economic uselessness of cats. Never, he told the reporter, had he heard of a cat's pulling a child out of a river by the seat of its trousers (an almost routine performance among Mr. Terhune's collies) or even balancing a ball on its nose in a vaudeville act. To me there is something offensively utilitarian in any such attitude, and the captious might even suspect that Mr. Terhune doesn't want a pet as much as a sort of combination lifeguard and acrobat. Dogs, like all weak and sentimental characters, are highly susceptible to suggestion, and they, too, have come to accept this unfortunate conception of themselves.

They have been quite willing to learn foolish tricks and run pointless errands, forfeiting their dignity and diffusing their personalities, until the average dog today is a sorry creature, functioning adequately neither as a guest in the house nor a servant.

Cats, on the other hand, have character and independence. They are realists, and they understand perfectly their position in domestic life, which is decorative and nothing else. Cats don't work, and I suspect they look on dogs, who do, as scum. In all the time I've known Dillinger, she has never shown the slightest interest in justifying her existence, and when you think about it, this is as it should be. After all, she was a lioness when the Terhune collies were wolves, or worse.

—Wolcott Gibbs

JANUARY 31, 1953
TURTLES

We strolled up to Hunter College the other evening for a meeting of the New York Zoological Society. Saw movies of grizzly cubs, learned the four methods of locomotion of snakes, and were told that the Society has established a turtle blood bank. Medical men, it seems, are interested in turtle

blood, because turtles don't suffer from arteriosclerosis in old age. The doctors are wondering whether there is some special property of turtle blood that prevents the arteries from hardening. It could be, of course. But there is also the possibility that a turtle's blood vessels stay in nice shape because of the way turtles conduct their lives. Turtles rarely pass up a chance to relax in the sun on a partly submerged log. No two turtles ever lunched together with the idea of promoting anything. No turtle ever went around complaining that there is no profit in book publishing except from the subsidiary rights. Turtles do not work day and night to perfect explosive devices that wipe out Pacific islands and eventually render turtles sterile. Turtles never use the word "implementation" or the phrases "hard core" and "in the last analysis." No turtle ever rang another turtle back on the phone. In the last analysis, a turtle, although lacking know-how, knows how to live. A turtle, by its admirable habits, gets to the hard core of life. That may be why its arteries are so soft.

—E. B. White

NOVEMBER 12, 1960

NICHOLS, MAY, AND HORSES

Having read in the program of the show called "An Evening with Mike Nichols and Elaine May" that Mr. Nichols had represented the United States on an Olympic equestrian team, we suggested last week that the partners join us at a session of the National Horse Show, at Madison Square Garden. When we met them at the entrance to the place, Mr. Nichols was quick to inform us that he hadn't been on any equestrian team in any Olympics, and Miss May told us that whatever interest she'd once had in horses had ended when she fell off one a couple of years ago on a Central Park bridle path and twisted all kinds of ligaments in her left arm.

"The horse was just walking," Miss May said, "and I kind of slid off him, and you should have seen the hurt look he gave me."

"Nobody ever falls off a walking horse," said Mr. Nichols. "You could fall down on the floor more easily than you could fall off a walking horse."

"Look," said Miss May, "I fell off this horse, and he was embarrassed and I was embarrassed, and so there. I had my arm in a cast for a long time."

Mr. Nichols, a blond and most amicable young man of twenty-nine, conceded the fall, and Miss May, who is brunette, rosy, and ebullient, seemed pleased.

"Now, about this Olympic business," we said.

"Oh, that," Mr. Nichols observed. "You see, when the program said that Elaine is a distant cousin of Ed Sullivan—we're all cousins if you take it right back to Adam—I thought it would be only fair for me to look pretty distinguished, too. Actually, I've known quite a few horses in my day, and I've ridden in horse shows in Chicago. I don't want to put on any side, but I was an instructor at the Claremont Riding Academy, up on West Eighty-ninth Street, when I was going to high school in Manhattan."

"It was one of those Claremont horses I fell off," said Miss May.

Any further discussion of Miss May's traumatic experience in the Park was interrupted by Mr. Edward Bimberg, a horse fancier and official engaged in stimulating attendance at the Show. It soon developed that Mr. Bimberg had also, in his day, been an instructor at the Claremont. Horse riders, like horseplayers, are a companionable crew, and in a jiffy we all went, arm in arm, down into the basement of the Garden to have a look at the horses stabled there. At the bottom of the ramp, we encountered a large gray horse, which was walking around, accompanied by a groom, in front of the area devoted to the beasts of the Dodge saddle-horse stables.

"Biggest in the country," said Mr. Nichols knowledgeably.

Miss May made a tentative pass at the muzzle of the big gray, and it blinked its great eyes and turned its head away.

"Imagine!" said Miss May. "I'm being rejected by a horse. This is a shattering experience."

We continued past orderly rows of box stalls until we came to one occupied by a splendid black animal that was being petted by a gentleman in a blue serge suit. The horse's lips were moving nervously, and Miss May proposed that we stick around until the gentleman was bitten.

"Horses will not bite you if you let them get the scent of you," said Mr. Bimberg. "Of course, if you exude salt in your palms, they will try to get it. They are crazy about salt."

"I think I'm exuding salt," said Miss May, backing away from the stall.

Not far from the nervous animal, we came upon a groom braiding the tail of a placid chestnut. Mr. Nichols pointed out that this would improve the horse's appearance and would help to ingratiate him with the Horse Show judges.

"Imagine!" said Miss May. "You get up in the morning, you have a nourishing breakfast, you say goodbye to the wife and kids, and then you spend the rest of the day braiding horses' tails." She was looking about reflectively when Mr. Nichols suddenly advised her that just beyond there was a man combing a tail with no horse attached, as indeed there was.

Elaine May and Mike Nichols

"Among the gaited horses," said Mr. Bimberg, "they are allowed to put on false tails."

Mr. Nichols and Mr. Bimberg got into a perceptive chat about gaited horses, Miss May wandered off, and we went over to watch a jumper being prepared for a contest. When the party reassembled, somewhere farther along, Miss May was trying to outstare a brown dachshund, which was snarling. "He hates me," she said.

"Never look a dog in the eye," said Mr. Bimberg.

"If I sweat, I get bitten by a horse, and

if I look, I get bitten by a dog," said Miss May dolefully.

We went on to watch a handsome bay having his front feet soothed in a whirlpool bath, and then made our way to the pressroom, where Miss May challenged Mr. Nichols to do his imitation of Audrey Hepburn's first entrance in "Ondine."

"Not here," he said. "Not here."

"You wouldn't believe this," said Miss May, "but my daughter Jeannie is a super rider, and she's only eleven. I was riding with her when I slid off that horse and hurt my arm. I love the outdoor life—like walking. I was surprised," she added unexpectedly, "to find all those horses being washed. I thought they just dusted them, or something."

"Give me a horse I can ride like a man," said Mr. Nichols. "Washed or unwashed."

Mr. Bimberg said that he'd like to oblige but the schedule of the show would not permit Mr. Nichols to demonstrate his equestrian skills.

"So now you'll *have* to imitate Audrey Hepburn," said Miss May. "You know," she continued, without pause, "I had a terrible argument about Shakespeare's sonnets with a man who interviewed us the other day. Just to make conversation, I said I hated them, and it turned out he loved them. But what can you do—just sit there?"

At the behest of Mr. Bimberg, we took our chums up to see some working hunters with lady riders in the main ring.

"I keep wondering whether I ought to buy a horse," said Mr. Nichols as the ladies and their mounts went through their expert paces.

"If you do, get one that really likes your scent," said Miss May.

—John McCarten

JULY 9, 1966

ON THE WAY TO GLADSTONE

We happen to know that a 1965 census of wild bears in New Jersey showed that there were twenty-two bears in the state at that time. A bear census in a place like Saskatchewan or Montana would be a complicated procedure, but in New Jersey the field personnel of the Department of Conservation and Economic Development outnumber the bears almost a hundred to one, so their reports to headquarters, in Trenton, provide what is probably an accurate annual count. This is particularly true if snow falls early, as it did last fall, and bear tracks can be noted before the bears go into hibernation. Since so few bears are walking around in the snow, every bearprint is distinguishable from every other bearprint, and an experienced observer can read the size, character, and itinerary of a New Jersey bear in its tracks. When a New Jersey bear dies, the event is, in a sense, a death in the family. Therefore, we felt sympathy, as well as surprise, when we read in a newspaper recently that a bear had been shot and killed in Fair Lawn, ten miles from Manhattan, and we experienced something like distress when we read, even more recently, that another bear had been shot and killed in New Jersey—this one in Pottersville, which is about thirty-three miles west of the Lincoln Tunnel. Moved by a strong hands-across-the-Hudson feeling, we went down to Trenton to see Lester MacNamara, director of the New Jersey Conservation and Economic Development Department's Division of Fish and Game.

Mr. MacNamara is a big man, who seems uncomfortable behind a desk, and his face is creased and windburned from a lifetime spent largely in the open air. He was born in the San Joaquin Valley, in California, and he has worked for New Jersey for the past thirty years, because he finds its wilderness areas, in the southern and northwestern parts of the state, more interesting and appealing than the country he hunted in when he was a boy. He told us that he didn't mind very much about the bear that had been shot in Fair Lawn. "It was a Himalayan bear—an exotic," he said. "They're sometimes called Russian bears. Two policemen shot him—with pistols, I guess. He must have got out of a circus or a carnival, and he probably went into somebody's apiary, or something like that, and so no one claimed him, because they might have had to pay damages. I'm not concerned about that bear, but I am plenty concerned about the other one, because he was a resident. He was a New Jersey bear."

A few days before the resident bear died, it was seen in Mount Olive, and then in Chester, where it had climbed into a tree. (Bears climb trees when they are frightened.) A small crowd collected, MacNamara told us, and a milkman coaxed the bear out of the tree by offering it a large container of cottage cheese and three quarts of milk. "Hell, that wasn't a dangerous animal," MacNamara said. "That was no grizzly bear or polar bear or big brown bear. That was a black bear—our common bear in this country, and the smallest bear in the bear family. Black bears are generally considered harmless unless provoked. This one was two years old, and he weighed two hundred and fifty pounds." After the bear drank its milk and ate its cheese, in Chester, it wandered off. MacNamara sent word to field personnel in Morris and Hunterdon Counties to be on the watch, telling them that the bear would probably turn up next in Gladstone, just south of the Morris-Hunterdon line.

We asked MacNamara how he knew that the bear would head in a southerly direction.

"They usually go that way," he said. "We kept track of one a few years ago that went all the way down to the Sourland Mountains, just outside of Princeton. He stayed right there for a couple of years, and he never got into any trouble. But this one, last week, never even got to Gladstone."

The bear was shot by a Pottersville farmer. After it had been hit once, with No. 5 shot, it climbed into a tree in the farmer's front yard. The farmer fired at it enough additional times to knock it out of the tree, dead. "We arrested the farmer," MacNamara said. "We'll hear from the agricultural organizations, but I don't care. You have to draw the line somewhere. You can't just shoot an animal like that because you think it can do harm. The bear was doing no damage. He was a threat to no one. All the man had to do was pick up a phone and call a conservation officer. We have specialists—biologists—who shoot tranquillizers into bears with a dart gun; then we can move them. We wanted to move this one up into the Kittatinny

Mountains. It's a shame. The species is not overabundant in New Jersey. We have only twenty-two bears—" He stopped and corrected himself, saying "Twenty-one."

—John McPhee

APRIL 24, 1978
DINOSAURS

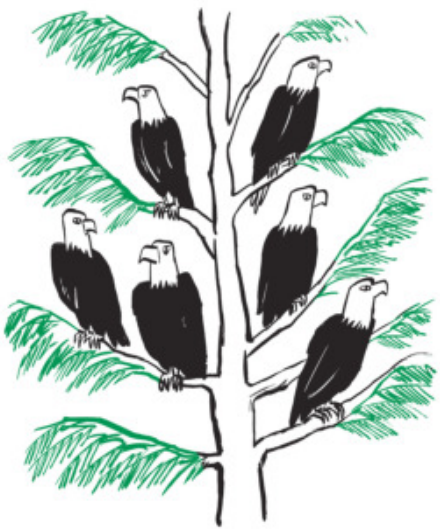
This is one of the nicest things to do in New York on a Sunday afternoon: Have a good late breakfast (something like a bowl of porridge, some scrambled eggs, some smoked herring, toast with raspberry jam would be just fine), and then put on some comfortable clothes and some comfortable shoes and go over to the American Museum of Natural History. If there are children in your family, by all means take them along. While you are there, don't miss the redwood-tree exhibit in the Hall of North American Forests, the worm exhibit in the Hall of the Biology of Invertebrates, the early-man exhibit in the Hall of the Biology of Man, the Mbuti Pygmies of the Ituri Forest in the Hall of Man in Africa, and the bird-watching exhibit in the Akeley Gallery. This is just what we did on a recent Sunday afternoon. We saw all the things we liked best and then a few of the things that are interesting anyway. It was while we were looking at a few of the things that are interesting anyway that we came across, in progress, a lecture on dinosaurs. The lecture was being given by Sidney Horenstein, a paleontologist on the museum's staff, and was sponsored by the New York Paleontological Society. Sitting on some yellow petroleum-by-product chairs, listening closely to him, and watching some slides he showed to accompany his chat were lots of moms and dads and their little children. Some other little children were in strollers. Mr. Horenstein said that dinosaurs were around two hundred and ten million years ago; that at that time the earth's atmosphere was warm; that as a group they lasted for one hundred and fifty million years, compared to our (man's) measly two million; that most dinosaurs were plant-eaters except a few, like the great *Tyrannosaurus rex*, which apparently ate smaller dinosaurs; that one bite for a *T. rex* could probably feed a human family of four for one month; that the *Megalosaurus* was the first dinosaur to be described scientifically; that the word "dinosaur" means "terrible lizard"; that dinosaurs that had lost their teeth stole dinosaur eggs and ate them; that *T. rex* had small hands, and no one knows what purpose its hands served except that maybe after it slept its hands helped it get up; that one genus with a bony crest on its head was called *Kritosaurus*, which means "chosen lizard"; that maybe dinosaurs became extinct because an interstellar explosion caused the earth's atmosphere to cool and the dinosaurs died of exposure, but then again maybe their extinction was caused by something else; that no one has ever seen a dinosaur or knows what dinosaurs really did. While Mr. Horenstein talked, he showed slides of dinosaurs doing things, and almost always the dinosaurs were in a swamp or near a swamp. He showed slides of dinosaurs with long, swanlike necks. He showed slides of baby dinosaurs just emerging from eggs the size of large avocados. He showed slides of dinosaurs attacking egg-stealing dinosaurs. He showed slides of dinosaurs eating no-longer-alive dinosaurs. He showed slides of dinosaurs with big teeth and slides of dinosaurs with little teeth. He showed slides of dinosaurs whose mouths looked like duck bills, and said that these dinosaurs were called hadrosaurs (meaning "bulky lizards"). He showed slides of dinosaurs with two horns and slides of dinosaurs with just one horn. He showed a slide of two dinosaurs battering their heads together. He showed slides of pink dinosaurs, blue dinosaurs, and green dinosaurs. Mr. Horenstein made it clear that it would be just wonderful to be one of these creatures, standing around in a gooey, warm swamp with your friends.

—Jamaica Kincaid

DECEMBER 3, 1984
EAGLES

Every fall in recent years, the densest concentration of bald eagles in the lower forty-eight states has been found by the banks of McDonald Creek, near the village of Apgar, in Glacier National

Park, Montana. Not long ago, so were we. New weather from the Gulf of Alaska had moved in the night before we got there, and the sky was soaped over with clouds, like the windows of a drive-in closed for the season. U.S. Highway 2 along the southern edge of the park was bare and wet between mounds of snow beginning their six-month residence. The bar signs were turned on by one-thirty in the afternoon. In the parking lot of a bar called Packers Roost was a pickup truck that had a flashlight, a Montana license plate, a tobacco pouch, a plastic bag of seeds, and a book titled "The Pope Plot" on the dashboard and a pair of handcuffs hanging from the rearview mirror. A sign on the left rear bumper



said "I Brake for the Hell of It." Within ten feet of the paved trail leading from Apgar to the bridge over the creek are ground-squirrel holes that a local restaurant is suspected of having used a while back to dispose of cooking grease. Last fall, a grizzly bear discovered the holes and spent several days digging up what was in them and eating it. The park rangers let him alone, and this year he's back to eating Kokanee salmon in the creek. Anywhere from thirty thousand to over a hundred thousand salmon come up the creek to spawn and die, starting in mid-September. The salmon draw the eagles, and the eagles draw more than two thousand people on a nice day. Via the people, all kinds of precision optics from Europe and Japan make their own migration to the bridge.

From far away, you can see the white heads of eagles in the tops of some Engelmann spruce. From the bridge railing, you can see eagles wading in the creek and perched on drift stumps and walking on the reddish pebbles. Eagles are placed symmetrically on alternate branches of a western larch downstream. The slim trunk of a dead lodgepole pine arching over a pool seems to have at least two eagles on it through early December. Some eagles hold fish in their talons, tearing off long strips with their bright-yellow beaks and then swallowing in a way that makes you hungry. They usually don't bother to eat the heads. Ring-billed gulls, California gulls, herring gulls, and Bonaparte's gulls get the scraps. In the shallow water, goldeneye ducks dive for salmon eggs. Mergansers—ducks that appear to fly underwater—chase salmon and catch them. A kingfisher arrows past, with his ratchety call. The creek gurgles, the gulls shriek, wind whistles through the primary feathers of mallard, widgeon, redhead, and bufflehead ducks banking in for a landing, automatic film-winders purr, and the salmon, the caterers of the whole affair, hold in tight pods in the greenish water and hit the surface in occasional splashes for no reason biologists can name. Then one of the eagles on the dead lodgepole stoops to the pool. Smaller birds depart in every direction; the eagle's talons swing down, cut the surface, come up empty. The eagle flaps a circuit back to his perch, and when he alights the other eagles bounce. They flap their wings to keep their balance and make a cry that echoes like the sound effects in jungle movies.

Sometimes Riley McClelland, a Glacier National Park research biologist, comes to the bridge, and people ask him questions. Riley McClelland has been studying eagles in Glacier for almost twenty years. He has tracked eagles over the Western states and the Northwest Territories of Canada, written reports on eagles, photographed eagles, trapped eagles in foam-rubber-padded leg traps, been bitten by eagles, taken sick eagles to the vet, and counted eagles. He speaks with an observer's quiet, like a person announcing a golf match. Today, he says, "Kokanee salmon are a landlocked form of Pacific sockeye salmon, and they've been spawning in this creek since the nineteen-thirties. They didn't exist in this watershed before the Montana Fish and Game Department brought them in, in 1916. The eagles started showing up in 1939, and we've been counting them since 1965. In our most recent census, we came up with four hundred and eighty-seven bald eagles in the area. There may be as many as two thousand eagles passing through here most years. Bald eagles are opportunists—they eat whatever flesh is easiest to get. Most of these eagles come from the Mackenzie River system, in northern Canada, where they eat winter-killed caribou, crippled waterfowl, fish, and dead bison—which they find only in Canada's Wood Buffalo Park. From here, some go as far west as the Klamath Basin, in Oregon, or as far east as Colorado. The largest number of them will winter in semi-desert country—particularly in the Rush Valley, in Utah. There they eat mainly jackrabbits that people have run over or shot for target practice."

A boy with an apostrophe of hair sticking out of the hole in the back of his adjustable baseball cap starts to shout at the eagle who just missed the fish, "Go for it again! Go for it!" A woman says, "Travis, *sh-h-h!* You'll disturb the birds!" Actually, the eagles don't pay much attention to the people, but then a light-green Park Service truck comes by, and a little way up the road it backfires. In an instant, the eagles demonstrate that they are not an assembly but a condensation. With unanimity, they rise, and in another minute they are nothing but scattered specks wheeling in the clouds to the north and west above Apgar Mountain. For a while, the air above the creek still holds the memory of all the big wings unfurling. The people on the bridge are motionless, breathing that air.

—Ian Frazier

APRIL 20, 1987
ZOO UPDATE

Walk over to what was once, and will be again (someday), the Central Park Zoo, and in the Arsenal you will find Richard Lattis, the director of the City Zoos Project, in

his office. At the drop of a hard hat, he will explain to you the purpose of all the busy construction that is going on at the zoo right now, as he did for us on a recent weekday. "New York City has five zoos," he explained. "Two of them, the Bronx and the Staten Island, are private, and the three others—Prospect Park, Flushing Meadow, and Central Park—used to be operated by the Department of Parks and Recreation. Anyway, as you may remember, there were a lot of protests about conditions in the city zoos. We made improvements at Prospect Park and Flushing Meadow to bring them up to standard until we could renovate, and we closed this one down. Back in 1982, we began dismantling things, moving out the animals gradually—they went to other boroughs and to zoos all over the country—and by 1983 the last specimen was gone and demolition began. Now, here"—he held up a large colored picture—"is what the designers, Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo & Associates, have come up with as a plan. As you can see, we're rebuilding the zoo completely. The old garage is being extended to include maintenance space and an animal kitchen. We'll have a clinic for the animals there, too. There will be a zoo school, for adults as well as children—we're very interested in education. The sea-lion pool will be much enlarged—and walled with glass, so you can watch the animals swimming and playing underwater. The polar-bear exhibit will be far bigger than the old one, with waterfalls and other things that bears like, and near it will be a refrigerated penguin house—I'm pretty sure we've never had penguins before. We're getting some from the Antarctic that are most unusual—chinstraps and gentoos. We'll have the lights arranged to give the feel of the South Pole—during our summer, they'll have long, dark winter nights, so they'll feel at home.

"Monkeys? We're going to have Japanese macaques, or maybe Barbary apes—it hasn't been decided which—but I think macaques are probably better, because they love water. They'll have a pool. We're also going to put in colobus monkeys, those beautiful black-and-white animals, and tamarins and squirrel monkeys. Plenty of primates, because everybody likes them. You see, this place won't be only for kids. It's a small zoo as zoos go—only five point five acres—but it's going to seem much larger than it used to. If you want, you can just drop in and *rest*. Or eat. It's a city zoo, for city people.

"We haven't closed the Children's Zoo, because we felt that at least something should be retained for the public while we were remodelling, but as soon as the main zoo opens we're going to close the Children's Zoo for renovation. We haven't got very far yet with those plans, but we want to do something like what they have in the Bronx. We'll call it something like the Enchanted Forest, and the idea is to make it a really magical place for children, where they can see the world from the animals' viewpoint: from a bird's nest or a spider's web—something like that. Well, shall we look around?"

It was a day devoted to pouring concrete: hoses lay underfoot in multicolored tangles, and we moved about on shaky planks. The polar-bear exhibit seemed almost ready, but Mr. Lattis explained that a lot of water would have to be channelled in before bears could safely swim.

"We're representing just three biomes," he said as we picked our way along. "Tropical, temperate, and polar. For the tropics, we'll have to put in special plants. For the temperate—well, we *are* in the temperate biome. For the polar, we have two environments—refrigeration for the penguins and a simulated glacial coast for the bears. If you remember, we used to have two species of bear—the grizzly and the polar—but the grizzlies have gone to Prospect Park for good. We'll have a few ocelots—they'll be the only cats—but the bears will be our largest animals. Elephants are really too big for us. Still, we'll have plenty of species.

"This is the arrangement now: the three zoos that were run by the Parks Department are going to be operated by the New York Zoological Society, which also runs the Bronx Zoo. They're the outfit I work for, by the way. I should add that all the design work was paid for by the Society, but we've had an enormous amount of help from private donations. Our most generous donor was the late Lila Wallace and her *Reader's Digest*, but there have been many others. I suppose you've heard of the ancient Chinese emperor who had a collection of rare animals in one of his imperial parks. He called it the Garden of Intelligence. When we open up again, we're going to have a sign at the entrance saying, 'The Central Park Zoo, operated by the New York Zoological Society for the Department of Parks and Recreation.' But I like to think that what we're really building is a modern Garden of Intelligence."

—Emily Hahn

JUNE 6, 1988
BEATRIX POTTER

A friend of ours went to the Beatrix Potter exhibition at the Pierpont Morgan Library and came back with this report:

I arrived at the Morgan in a torrential rainstorm, took off my rain gear, and headed for the main exhibition hall. This show is entitled "Beatrix Potter: Artist and Storyteller," but Potter was first and foremost a naturalist, and the walls of the Morgan testify to that. Beatrix Potter was

"The question is, is this a manicure or a pedicure?"

• •

born in 1866, and lived an unusually solitary life. Until her brother Bertram was born, in 1872, she had hardly ever seen another child. On summer holidays in Scotland and, later, in the Lake District, she and Bertram fell passionately in love with the natural world. In the main room you can see her precise and intensely focussed watercolor drawings of fossils, weasels, bats, butterflies, and fungi. (Fungi were her particular interest.) There are sketches of a dead thrush, and a drawing of sweet bay with faint arrows drawn in to show the angle of the light, and there are studies of pigs, mice, and lizards, and an anatomical drawing of a sheet-web spider, and details of insect legs and wings. A zoologist who had never heard of "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" would feel perfectly at home at this show.

In a glass case is a sketchbook that Beatrix Potter kept at the age of eight. One page has a color study of caterpillars, and on the facing page, written in a childlike but well-developed hand, are some observations on their habits. In another case is another set of hand-written notes, on the subjects of Penicillium and other fungi, and cancer research—these written when Beatrix Potter was seventy.

Potter's biographer, Margaret Lane, tells us that she and Bertram, as children, boiled a dead fox in order to articulate its skeleton. At the Morgan is a letter written by Bertram, away at school, to Beatrix, who was then about twenty, that says, "I should advise you to boil that dog's skull in soda if you can get a pan." Blown-up photos of her as a young girl and a young woman show a sweet-faced person with a level gaze. A shot of her at sixty-five introduces a stout, rather formidable-looking woman in tweeds, clogs, and a felt hat. (By that time, she was a Lake District farmer and sheep breeder.) The clogs are under glass at the Morgan, and so is her paintbrush.

Potter's first commercial venture, undertaken when she was twenty-four, was a series of Christmas cards showing handsomely dressed rabbits engaged in social life—these are on display, too—but it was "Peter Rabbit" that made her famous. The book began as a letter to a little boy named Noel Moore, who was recuperating from an illness. "My dear Noel," the letter begins. "I don't know what to write to you, so I shall tell you a story about four little rabbits whose names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter." This letter is on display, of course, and so are the original drawings from the book. These and all the original pictures for her books are a revelation. Generations of children and parents have loved these books, but no printing process, however advanced, does justice to the richness and clarity of the pictures.

Near a display of editions of "Peter Rabbit" in a number of languages, and in Braille, is a drawing that was tossed out after the fifth printing—a cheerful picture of Mrs. McGregor handing a nice-looking pie to an unseen Mr. McGregor. The pie, as the text makes clear, contains Peter's father, and Potter's publisher considered the picture too gruesome for children. But it seems to me that this deceptively sweet drawing gets to the heart of Beatrix Potter's charm. She never wrote down to children and she did not whitewash nature on their behalf. Scary things happen in her books. (Of course, funny things happen, too.) Mr. Jeremy Fisher goes fishing in the rain and is almost eaten by a trout; poor Tom Kitten is set upon by Anna Maria and Samuel Whiskers, who want to turn him into a roly-poly pudding. The show demonstrates that Beatrix Potter was a precise and serious little girl, and that when she grew up and made books for children she saw no need to lower her standards.

When it was time to leave, I put on my raincoat, and felt rather like Mr. Jeremy Fisher as I watched the rain come down in sheets. Also looking out was a woman carrying a toddler and holding a little boy by the hand. This reminded me that I had seen very few children at the show. I asked the woman how her children had liked it.

"They *loved* it," she said. "I just wish the pictures had been hung lower."

—Laurie Colwin

SEPTEMBER 22, 2008
ONE BY ONE

If people, viewed from a great height, look like ants, do ants, viewed at close range, look like people? Of course not. Ants have six legs, compound eyes, no lungs, and impossibly narrow waists, and they tend to hang around with aphids and mealybugs. Still, behavioral similarities make them excellent analogues. Ants, like humans, are into career specialization, livestock herding, engineering, climate control, in-flight sex, and war; for them, as for us, free will may or may not be an illusion. As for whether ants look to humans for insight into themselves, science has no answer.

A few years ago, Marko Pecarevic, a Croatian graduate student studying conservation biology at Columbia University, met with his adviser, the urban ecologist James Danoff-Burg, to come up with a subject for his master's thesis. Danoff-Burg had some data on ants in city parks and wondered if Pecarevic wanted to work on that. Pecarevic thought not. But afterward, crossing Broadway, he saw ants crawling around a garbage bin on one of the avenue's medians. Medians! As habitats, the planted medians of Broadway were ubiquitous but overlooked, suitably biodiverse but extraordinarily distressed. For someone interested, as Pecarevic was, in the ecology of heavily compromised urban environments, medians were like remote, unexplored island chains—a Galápagos in Manhattan. He decided to be their Darwin. Employing Google Earth (forgive him, he's from Zagreb), he chose three median-rich stretches—Park Avenue, the West Side Highway, and Broadway—then made himself an official-looking I.D., dressed in parkish green, and started collecting ants, travelling the city with a duffelbag of garden tools and Evian bottles filled with antifreeze. No one bothered him.

On a recent afternoon, Pecarevic, a trim, wry thirty-two-year-old, went out on a survey of his medians. For demonstration purposes, he had cadged a plastic cup from a coffeeshop, and pocketed a spoon. He carried, as he always does, an aspirator, a plastic tube that he uses to collect ants. He inhales them, alive, into a chamber. "Sometimes, when you suck up ants, they're not happy about it," he said. "If you blow cigarette smoke on them, they calm down." Really, this was a farewell tour—he was returning to Zagreb the next day, to pursue a doctorate. His thesis ("Ant Diversity and Abundance Increase with Increasing Plant Complexity and Amount of Garbage Bins in New York City Street Medians") was done, and he was bequeathing to New York some interesting conclusions about its ants.

For example, ants seem to have an astute sense of neighborhood stereotypes. The Upper West Side, as it happens, is more diverse, ant-wise, than the Upper East Side. Diversity is a function of habitat, and habitat, on the medians, is reflective of the people who live around them. As you might expect, Park Avenue medians contain fewer garbage cans (the greatest determinants of ant variety and abundance) and less complex flora; they are more manicured, less riotous. "On some parts of Broadway, it doesn't look like anyone's been there for years," Pecarevic said. Ants like that.

Pecarevic surmised that ants got from one median to another mostly via intercourse. A queen and a male, both winged, mate in the air—the nuptial flight, as it's known. The male dies, and the female, alighting in a new place, starts a colony. One mating session provides her with enough ant sperm to last a lifetime; she can produce an egg every few seconds for the rest of her life. (This arrangement holds on both sides of Central Park, so we should infer nothing about the connubial difficulties of 10021 versus those of 10024.)

To collect the ants, Pecarevic had also laid pitfall traps, three per median. These were clear plastic cups dug into the dirt, and partly filled with antifreeze. The ants fell in and died quickly, before they could dismember one another. He left the traps for three days. To warn off maintenance crews, he had affixed tiny signs to toothpicks, which he stuck in the ground. After emptying the traps, he spent three minutes around each one, sucking up live ants with the aspirator. Back home, he poured the antifreeze through a colander, over the toilet. He washed and preserved the ants in alcohol. Over the course of two years, he had collected six thousand six hundred and nineteen ants, from forty-four medians, and identified fourteen species.

There are roughly twelve thousand known species of ant. The three most common, on the medians, were, in ascending order, the cornfield ant, the thief ant, and, from Europe, the pavement ant. "If you see an ant walking on pavement, it's probably a pavement ant," Pecarevic said. Also, if you see ants fighting on the pavement. "They have huge fights. They bite each other."

The day was hot and hazy—maybe not so good for anting. On the median at Seventy-fourth Street, on Broadway, Pecarevic turned up spoonfuls of earth and sifted through them, as though digging for steamers. Nothing. Ants: never there when you need them. On Seventy-sixth Street, he found a colony of pavement ants in some rotting wood bordering a flower bed. They ran wild over a Popsicle stick, a plastic spoon, pistachio nuts, Marlboro butts, and degraded credit-card receipts. No fighting and biting today. On Park Avenue, south of Seventy-ninth, he prowled a begonia bed and a bit of parched lawn, under some cherry trees. Antless.

Two summers ago, on Broadway, north of 100th Street, Pecarevic discovered a species that had previously never been found north of Virginia, the Chinese needle ant, an invasive predator with a powerful sting. He'd found four of them—a colony, perhaps. He went back again last summer, but the needle ants were gone. He theorized that the cold winter had wiped them out. "I was hoping to find more," he said. "It would have been nice to get some funding for more research." There will be ants in Zagreb.

—Nick Paumgarten

REFLECTIONS JUNE 12, 1948

BUTTERFLIES

The childhood of a lepidopterist.

BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Nabokov with a butterfly net in the hills of Switzerland, circa 1975.

HORST TAPPE / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY

On a summer morning, in the legendary Russia of my boyhood, my first glance upon awakening was for the chink between the shutters. If it disclosed a watery pallor, one had better not open the shutters at all, and so be spared the sight of a sullen day sitting for its picture in a puddle. How resentfully one would deduce, from a line of dull light, the leaden sky, the sodden sand, the gruel-like mess of broken brown blossoms under the lilacs, and that flat, fallow leaf, the first casualty of the season, pasted upon a wet garden bench!

But if the chink was a long glint of dewy brilliancy, then I made haste to have the window yield its treasure. With one blow, the room would be cleft into light and shade. The foliage of birches moving in the sun had the translucent green tone of grapes, and in contrast to this there was the dark velvet of fir trees against a blue of extraordinary intensity, the like of which I rediscovered only many years later, in the montane zone of Colorado.

From the age of five, everything I felt in connection with a rectangle of framed sunlight was dominated by a single passion. If my first glance of the morning was for the sun, my first thought was for the butterflies it would engender. The original event had been banal enough. On some honeysuckle near the veranda, I had happened to see a Swallowtail—a splendid, pale-yellow creature with black blotches and blue crenulations, and a cinnabar eyespot above each chrome-rimmed black tail. As it probed the inclined flower from which it hung, it kept restlessly jerking its great wings, and my desire for it was overwhelming. Justin, an agile footman, caught it in my cap, after which it was transferred, cap and all, to a wardrobe, where the reek of naphthalene was expected to kill it overnight. On the following morning, however, when my governess unlocked the wardrobe to take something out, the butterfly, with a mighty rustle, flew into her face, then made for the open window, and presently was a golden fleck dipping and dodging and soaring eastward, over timber and tundra, to Vologda, Viatka, and Perm, and beyond the gaunt Ural range to Yakutsk and Verkhne Kolymsk, and from Verkhne Kolymsk, where it lost a tail, to the fair island of St. Lawrence, and across Alaska to Dawson, and southward along the Rocky Mountains—to be finally overtaken and captured, after a forty-year race, on a bright-yellow dandelion in a bright-green glade above Boulder.

Soon after the wardrobe affair, I found a spectacular moth, and my mother killed it with ether. In later years, I used many killing agents, but the least contact with the initial stuff would always cause the door of the past to fly open. Once, as a grown man, I was under ether during an operation, and with the vividness of a decalcomania picture I saw my own self in a sailor suit mounting a freshly emerged Emperor moth under the guidance of my smiling mother. It was all there, brilliantly reproduced in my dreams, while my own vitals were being exposed: the soaking, ice-cold absorbent cotton pressed to the lemurian head of the moth; the subsiding spasm of its body; the satisfying crackle produced by the pin penetrating the chitinous crust of its thorax; the careful insertion of the pin in the cork-bottomed groove of the spreading board; the symmetrical adjustment of the strong-veined, "windowed" wings under neatly affixed strips of paper.

I must have been eight or nine when, in a storeroom of our country house, among a medley of dusty objects, I discovered some wonderful books acquired in the days when my mother's mother had been interested in natural science and had had a university professor of

zoology give private lessons to her daughter. Some of these books were mere curios, such as the four huge brown folios of Albertus Seba's work ("Locupletissimi Rerum Naturalium Thesauri Accurata Descriptio . . ."), printed in Amsterdam around 1750. On their coarse-grained pages, I found woodcuts of serpents and butterflies and embryos. The cut showing the fetus of an Ethiopian female child hanging by the neck in a glass jar used to give me a nasty shock every time I came across it, nor did I much care for the stuffed hydra on Plate CII, with its seven lion-toothed turtle heads on seven serpentine necks and its strange, bloated body, which bore buttonlike tubercles along the sides and ended in a knotted tail.

Other books I found in that attic, among herbariums full of pressed edelweiss flowers and crimson maple leaves, came closer to my subject. I took in my arms and carried downstairs glorious loads of fantastically attractive volumes: Maria Sibylla Merian's (1647-1717) lovely plates of Surinam insects, and Esper's noble "Die Schmetterlinge" (Erlangen, 1777), and Boisduval's "Icones Historiques de Lépidoptères Nouveaux ou Peu Connus" (Paris, 1832). Still more exciting were the products of the latter half of the nineteenth century: Newman's "Natural History of British Butterflies and Moths," Hofmann's "Die Gross-Schmetterlinge Europas," the Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich's "Mémoires," on Asiatic Lepidoptera (with incomparably beautiful figures painted by Kavrigin, Rybakov, Lang), Scudder's stupendous work on the butterflies of New England.

By my early teens, I was already voraciously reading entomological periodicals, especially British and Russian ones. Great upheavals were taking place in the development of systematics. Since the middle of the century, Continental lepidopterology had been, on the whole, a simple and stable affair, smoothly run by the Germans. Its high priest, Dr. Staudinger, was also the head of the largest firm of insect dealers. Even now, half a century after his death, German lepidopterists have not quite managed to shake off the hypnotic spell occasioned by his authority. He was still alive when his school began to lose ground as a scientific force in the world. While he and his followers stuck to specific and generic names sanctioned by long usage and were content to classify butterflies by characteristics visible to the naked eye, English-speaking authors were introducing nomenclatural changes as a result of a strict application of the law of priority, and taxonomic changes based on the microscopic study of organs. The Germans did their best to ignore the new trends and continued to cherish the philately-like side of entomology. Their solicitude for the "average collector who cannot be made to dissect" is comparable to the way nervous publishers pamper the "average reader"—who cannot be made to think.

There was another, more general change, which coincided with my ardent adolescent interest in butterflies and moths. The Victorian and Staudingerian kind of species, hermetic and homogeneous, with sundry "varieties"—alpine, polar, insular, etc.—affixed to it from the outside, as it were, like incidental appendages, was replaced by a new, multiform, and fluid kind of species, made up of geographical races or subspecies. The evolutional aspects of the case were thus brought out more clearly, by means of more flexible methods of classification, and further links between butterflies and the central problems of nature were provided by biological investigations.

The mysteries of mimicry had a special attraction for me. Its phenomena showed an artistic perfection usually associated with man-wrought things. Such was the imitation of oozing poison by bubble-like macules on a wing (complete with pseudo-refraction) or by glossy yellow knobs on a chrysalis ("Don't eat me—I have already been squashed, sampled, and rejected"). When a certain moth resembled a certain wasp in shape and color, it also walked and moved its antennae in a waspish, unmothlike manner. When a butterfly had to look like a leaf, not only were all the details of a leaf beautifully rendered but markings mimicking grub-bored holes were generously thrown in. "Natural selection," in the Darwinian sense, could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of "the struggle for life" when a protective device was carried to a point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation. I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception.

Few things indeed have I known in the way of emotion or appetite, ambition or achievement, that could surpass in richness and strength the excitement of entomological exploration. From the very first, it had a great many intertwinkling facets. One of them was the acute desire to be alone, since any companion, no matter how quiet, interfered with the concentrated enjoyment of my mania. Its gratification admitted of no compromise or exception. Tutors and governesses knew that the morning was mine and cautiously kept away.

In this connection, I remember the visit of a schoolmate, a boy of whom I was very fond and with whom I had excellent fun. He arrived one summer night from a town some fifty miles away. His father had recently perished in an accident, the family was ruined, and the stouthearted lad, not being able to afford the price of a railway ticket, had bicycled all those miles to spend a few days with me. On the morning following his arrival, I did everything I could to get out of the house for my morning hike without his knowing where I had gone. Breakfastless, with hysterical haste, I gathered my net, pillboxes, and sailor cap, and escaped through the window. Once in the forest, I was safe, but still I walked on, my calves quaking, my eyes full of scalding tears, the whole of me twitching with shame and self-disgust as I visualized my poor friend, with his long, pale face and black tie, moping in the hot garden—patting the panting dogs for want of something better to do, and trying hard to justify my absence to himself.

Let me look at my demon objectively. With the exception of my parents, no one really understood my obsession, and it was many years before I met a fellow-sufferer. One of the first things I learned was not to depend on others for the growth of my collection. Aunts, however, kept making me ridiculous presents—such as Denton mounts of gaudy but really quite ordinary insects. Our

country doctor, with whom I had left the pupae of a rare moth when I went on a journey abroad, wrote me that everything had hatched finely, but in reality a mouse had got at the precious pupae, and upon my return the deceitful old man produced some common tortoise-shell butterflies, which, I presume, he had hurriedly caught in his garden and popped into the breeding cage as plausible substitutes—so *he* thought. Better than he was an enthusiastic kitchen boy who would sometimes borrow my equipment and come back two hours later in triumph with a bagful of seething invertebrate life and several additional items. Loosening the mouth of the net that he had grotesquely tied up with a string, he would pour out his cornucopian spoil—a mass of grasshoppers, some sand, the stem and cap of a mushroom he had thriftily plucked on the way home, more grasshoppers, more sand, and one battered Cabbage butterfly.

I found out very soon that an entomologist indulging in his quiet quest was apt to provoke strange reactions in other creatures. In this respect, America has shown more interest in my doings than other countries have—perhaps because I was in my forties when I came here to live, and the older the man, the queerer he looks with a butterfly net in his hand. Stern farmers have drawn my attention to "No Fishing" signs; from cars passing me on the highway have come wild howls of derision; sleepy dogs, though unmindful of the worst bum, have perked up and come at me snarling; tiny tots have pointed me out to their puzzled mamas; broad-minded vacationists have asked me whether I was catching bugs for bait; and one morning, on a wasteland lit by tall yuccas in bloom near Santa Fe, a big, black mare followed me for more than a mile.

When, having shaken off all pursuers, I took the rough, red road that ran from our house toward field and forest, the animation and lustre of the day seemed like a tremor of sympathy around me. Black Erebia butterflies (they are called Ringlets in England), with a special gentle awkwardness peculiar to their kind, danced among the firs. From a flower head, two male Coppers rose to a tremendous height, fighting all the way up, and then, after a while, came the downward flash of one of them returning to his thistle. These were familiar insects, but at any moment something better might cause me to stop with a quick intake of breath. I remember one day when I warily brought my net closer and closer to a little Thecla that had daintily settled on a sprig. I could clearly see the white "W" on its chocolate-brown underside. Its wings were closed and the inferior ones were rubbing against each other in a curious, circular motion—possibly producing some small, blithe crepitation a human ear could not catch. I had long wanted that particular species and, when near enough, I struck. You have heard champion tennis players moan after missing an easy shot. You have seen stunned golfers smile horrible, helpless smiles. But that day nobody saw me shake out a piece of twig from an otherwise empty net and stare at a hole in the tarlatan.

However, if the morning hunt had been a failure, one could still look forward to mothing. Colors would die a long death on June evenings. The lilac bushes in full bloom, before which I stood, net in hand, displayed clusters of a fluffy gray in the dusk—the ghost of purple. A moist young moon hung above the mist of a neighboring meadow. In many a garden have I stood thus in later years—in Athens, Antibes, Atlanta—but never have I waited with such a keen desire as before those darkening lilacs.

And suddenly it would come, the low buzz passing from flower to flower, the vibrational halo around the tapering pinkish body of a Hummingbird moth poised in the air above a corolla. Its handsome black larva, resembling a diminutive cobra when it puffed out its ocellated front segments, could be found on dank willow herb two months later. Thus, every hour and season had its delights. And, finally, on frosty autumn nights one could sugar for moths by painting tree trunks with a mixture of molasses, beer, and rum. Through the gusty blackness, one's lantern would illumine the stickily glistening furrows of the bark and two or three large moths upon it imbibing the sweets, their nervous wings half open, butterfly fashion, the lower ones exhibiting their incredible crimson silk from beneath the lichen-gray primaries. "*Catocala adultera!*" I would shriek triumphantly in the direction of the lighted windows of the house as I stumbled home to show my captures to my father.

The "English" park that separated our house from the hayfields was an extensive and elaborate affair, with labyrinthine paths and Turgenevian benches and imported oaks among the endemic firs and birches. The struggle that had gone on since my grandfather's time to keep the park from reverting to its natural wild state always fell short of complete success. No gardener could cope with the hillocks of black earth that the pink hands of moles kept heaping up on the tidy sand of the main path. Weeds and fungi and ridgelike tree roots crossed and recrossed the sun-flecked trails. Bears had been eliminated in the eighties—two stuffed giants, victims of that campaign, stood on their hind legs in our entrance hall—but elk still visited the grounds. On a picturesque boulder, a little mountain ash and a still smaller aspen had climbed, holding hands, like two clumsy, shy children. Other, more elusive trespassers—lost picnickers or merry villagers—would drive our hoary gamekeeper Ivan crazy by scrawling ribald words on the benches at night. The disintegrating process continues still, in a different sense, for when, nowadays, I attempt to follow in memory the winding paths from one given point to another, I notice—alas!—that there are many gaps, owing to oblivion or ignorance, akin to the terra-incognita blanks the old mapmakers used to call "sleeping beauties."

Beyond the park, there were fields, with a continuous shimmer of butterfly wings over a shimmer of flowers—daisies, bluebells, scabious, and others—which now rapidly pass by me in a kind of colored haze, like those lovely, lush meadows, never to be explored, that one sees from the diner on a transcontinen-

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tal journey. At the end of this grassy wonderland, the forest rose like a wall. There I roamed, scanning the tree trunks (the enchanted, the silent part of a tree) for certain tiny moths, called Pugs in England—delicate little creatures that cling in the daytime to speckled surfaces, with which their flat wings and turned-up abdomens blend. There, at the bottom of that sea of sun-shot greenery, I slowly spun around the great boles. Nothing in the world would have seemed sweeter to me than to be able to add, by a stroke of luck, some remarkable new species to the long list of Pugs already named by others. And my pied imagination, ostensibly and almost grotesquely grovelling to my desire (but all the time, in ghostly conspiracies behind the scenes, coolly planning the most distant events of my destiny), kept providing me with hallucinatory samples of small print: "... the only specimen so far known ..." "... the only specimen of *Eupithecia petropolitana* was taken by a Russian schoolboy ..." "... by a young Russian collector ..." "... by myself in the Government of St. Petersburg, Tzarskoye Selo District, in 1912 ... 1913 ... 1914 ... 1915."

Then came a year when I felt the urge to push on still farther and explore the vast marshland beyond the River Oredezh. After skirting the bank for three or four miles, I found a rickety footbridge. While crossing over, I could see the huts of a hamlet on my left, apple trees, rows of tawny pine logs lying on a green slope, and the bright patches made on the turf by the scattered clothes of peasant girls, who, stark naked, romped in the shallow water and yelled, heeding me as little as if I were the discarnate carrier of my present reminiscences. On the other side of the river, a dense crowd of small, bright-blue butterflies that had been tippling on the rich, trampled mud and cow dung through which I had to trudge rose all together into the spangled air and settled again as soon as I had passed.

After making my way through some pine groves and alder scrub, I came to the swamp. No sooner had my ear caught the hum of Diptera around me, the cry of a snipe overhead, the gulping sounds of the morass under my foot than I knew I would find here quite special arctic butterflies, the pictures of which I had worshipped for several seasons. And the next moment I was among them. Over the bilberry shrubs, with their dim, dreamy blue fruit, over the brown eye of stagnant water, over moss, over mire, over the fragrant racemes of the lone and mysterious marsh rocket, a dark little Fritillary, bearing the name of a Norse goddess, passed in a low, skimming flight. I pursued rose-margined Sulphurs, gray-stippled Satyrs. Unmindful of the mosquitoes that covered my forearms and neck, I stooped with a grunt of delight to snuff out the life of some silver-studded lepidopteron throbbing in the folds of my net. Through the smells of the marsh, I caught the subtle perfume of butterfly wings on my hands, a perfume that varies with the species; it may be vanilla, or lemon, or musk, or a musty, sweetish odor difficult to define. Still unsated, I pressed forward. At last, I saw I had come to the end of the swamp. The rising ground beyond was a paradise of lupines, columbines, and pentstemons. Mariposa lilies bloomed under the ponderosa pines. In the distance, fleeting cloud shadows dappled the olive green of slopes above timber line, and the gray and white of Longs Peak.

I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let visitors trip. And the highest enjoyment of timelessness—in a landscape selected at random—is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy, and behind the ecstasy is something else, which I cannot explain. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love, a sense of oneness with sun and stone, a thrill of gratitude to whom it may concern, perhaps to the contrapuntal genius of human fate or to the tender ghosts humoring a lucky mortal. ♦

"You say you're the good cop? I know that's a doughnut."

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HARBORING RATS

Vermin of the waterfront and beyond.

BY JOSEPH MITCHELL

A turn-of-the-century New York City rat catcher displays rats killed by his ferret.

GRANGER

In New York, as in all great seaports, rats abound. One is occasionally in their presence without being aware of it. In the whole city relatively few blocks are entirely free of them. They have diminished greatly in the last twenty-five years, but there still are millions here; some authorities believe that in the five boroughs there is a rat for every human being. During a war, the rat populations of seaports and of ships always shoot up. House rats left their nests in basements and began to dig burrows in vacant lots and parks, particularly Central Park, earlier this spring than they have for many years. A steady increase in shipboard rats began to be noticed in New York Harbor in the summer of 1940, less than a year after the war started in Europe. Rats and rat fleas in many foreign ports are at times infected with the plague, an extraordinarily ugly disease that occurs in several forms, of which the bubonic, the Black Death of the Middle Ages, is the most common. Consequently, all ships that enter the harbor after touching at a foreign port are examined for rats or for signs of rat infestation by officials of the United States Public Health Service, who go out in cutters from a quarantine station on the Staten Island bank of The Narrows. If a ship appears to be excessively infested, it is anchored in the bay or in one of the rivers, its crew is taken off, and its holds and cabins are fumigated with gas so poisonous that a whiff or two will quickly kill a man, let alone a rat. In 1939 the average number of rats killed in a fumigation was 12.4. In 1940 the average rose abruptly to 21, and two years later it reached 32.1. In 1943, furthermore, rats infected with the plague bacteria, *Pasteurella pestis*, were discovered in the harbor for the first time since 1900. They were taken out of an old French tramp, the Wyoming, in from Casablanca, where the Black Death has been intermittent for centuries.

The biggest rat colonies in the city are found in rundown structures on or near the waterfront, especially in tenements, live-poultry markets, wholesale produce markets, slaughterhouses, warehouses, stables, and garages. They also turn up in more surprising places. Department of Health inspectors have found their claw and tail tracks in the basements of some of the best restaurants in the city. A few weeks ago, in the basement and sub-basement of a good old hotel in the East Forties, a crew of exterminators trapped two hundred and thirty-six in three nights. They nest in the roofs of some El stations and many live in crannies in the subways; in the early-morning hours, during the long lulls between trains, they climb to the platforms and forage among the candy-bar wrappers and peanut hulls. There are old rat paths beneath the benches in at least two ferry sheds. In the spring and summer, multitudes of one species, the brown rat, live in twisting, many-chambered burrows in vacant lots and parks. There are great colonies of this kind of rat in Central Park. The rat that Mrs. Zorah White Gristede, the critic of Park Commissioner Moses, pointed out for a newspaper photographer last week in the Eighty-fifth Street playground in Central Park was a brown rat. After the first cold snap they begin to migrate, hunting for warm basements. Herds have been seen on autumn nights scuttering across Fifth Avenue. All through October and November, exterminating firms get frantic calls from the superintendents of many of the older apartment houses on the avenues and streets adjacent to the Park; the majority of the newer houses were ratproofed when built. The rats come out by twos and threes in some side

streets in the theatrical district practically every morning around four-thirty. The scow-shaped trucks that collect kitchen scraps from restaurants, night clubs, and saloons all over Manhattan for the pig farms of Secaucus, New Jersey, roll into these streets at that time. Shortly after the trucks have made their pick-ups, if no people are stirring, the rats appear and search for dropped scraps; they seem to pop out of the air.

The rats of New York are quicker-witted than those on farms, and they can outthink any man who has not made a study of their habits. Even so, they spend most of their lives in a state of extreme anxiety, the black rats dreading the brown and both species dreading human beings. Away from their nests, they are usually on the edge of hysteria. They will severely bite babies (there was an epidemic of this a year or so ago in a row of tenements in the Wallabout neighborhood in Brooklyn), and they will bite sleeping adults, but ordinarily they flee from people. If hemmed in, and sometimes if too suddenly come upon, they will attack. They fight savagely and blindly, in the manner of mad dogs; they bare their teeth and leap about every which way, snarling and snapping and clawing the air. A full-grown black rat, when desperate, can jump three feet horizontally and make a vertical leap of two feet two inches, and a brown rat is nearly as spry. They are greatly feared by firemen. One of the hazards of fighting a fire in a junk shop or in an old warehouse is the crazed rats. It is dangerous to poke at them. They are able to run right up a cane or a broomstick and inflict deep, gashlike bites on their assailant's hands. A month or so ago, in broad daylight, on the street in front of a riding academy on the West Side, a stableboy tried to kill a rat with a mop; it darted up the mop handle and tore the thumbnail off the boy's left hand. This happening was unusual chiefly in that the rat was foraging in the open in the daytime. As a rule, New York rats are nocturnal. They rove in the streets in many neighborhoods, but only after the sun has set. They steal along as quietly as spooks in the shadows close to the building line, in the gutters, peering this way and that, sniffing, quivering, conscious every moment of all that is going on around them. They are least cautious in the two or three hours before dawn, and they are encountered most often by milkmen, night watchmen, scrubwomen, policemen, and other people who are regularly abroad in those hours. The average person rarely sees one. When he does, it is a disquieting experience. Anyone who has been confronted by a rat in the bleakness of a Manhattan dawn and has seen it whirl and slink away, its claws rasping against the pavement, thereafter understands fully why this beast has been for centuries a symbol of the Judas and the stool pigeon, of soullessness in general. Veteran exterminators say that even they are unable to be calm around rats. "I've been in this business thirty-one years and I must've seen fifty thousand rats, but I've never got accustomed to the look of them," one elderly exterminator said recently. "Every time I see one my heart sinks and I get the belly flutters." In alcoholic wards the rat is the animal that most frequently appears in the visual hallucinations of patients with delirium tremens. In Ireland, in fact, the D.T.'s are often referred to as "seeing the rat."

There are three kinds of rats in the city—the black (*Rattus rattus rattus*), which is also known as the ship or the English rat; the Alexandrian (*Rattus rattus alexandrinus*), which is also known as the roof or the Egyptian rat; and the brown (*Rattus norvegicus*), which is also known as the house, gray, sewer, or Norway rat. In recent years they have been killed here in the approximate proportion of ninety brown to nine black and one Alexandrian. The brown is hostile to the other kinds; it usually attacks them on sight. It kills them by biting their throats or by clawing them to pieces, and, if hungry, it eats them. The behavior and some of the characteristics of the three kinds are dissimilar, but all are exceedingly destructive, all are hard to exterminate, all are monstrously procreative, all are badly flea-bitten, and all are able to carry a number of agonizing diseases. Among these diseases, in addition to the plague, are a form of typhus fever called Brill's disease, which is quite common in several ratty ports in the South; spirochetal jaundice, rat-bite fever, trichinosis, and tularemia. The plague is the worst. Human beings develop it in from two to five days after they have been bitten by a flea that has fed on a plague-infected rat. The onset is sudden, and the classic symptoms are complete exhaustion, mental confusion, and black, intensely painful swellings (called buboes) of the lymph glands in the groin and under the arms. The mortality is high. The rats of New York are all ridden with a flea, the *Xenopsylla cheopis*, which is by far the most frequent transmitting agent of the plague. Several surveys of the prevalence in the city of the *cheopis* have been made by Benjamin E. Holsendorf, a consultant on the staff of the Department of Health. Mr. Holsendorf, a close-mouthed, elderly Virginian, is a retired Passed Assistant Pharmacist in the Public Health Service and an international authority on the rat-proofing of ships and buildings. He recently supervised the trapping of many thousands of rats in the area between Thirty-third Street and the bottom of Manhattan, and found that these rats had an average of eight *cheopis* fleas on them. "Some of these rats had three fleas, some had fifteen, and some had forty," Mr. Holsendorf says, "and one old rat had hundreds on him; his left hind leg was missing and he'd take a tumble every time he tried to scratch. However, the average was eight. None of these fleas were plague-infected, of course. I don't care to generalize about this, but I will say that if just one plague-infected rat got ashore from a ship at a New York dock and roamed for only a few hours among our local, uninfected rats, the resulting situation might be, to say the least, quite sinister."

Rats are almost as fecund as germs. In New York, under fair conditions, they bear from three to five times a year, in litters of from five to twenty-two. There is a record of seven litters in seven months from a single captured pair. The period of gestation is between twenty-one and twenty-five days. They grow rapidly and are able to breed when four months old. That is why they can take a mile when given an inch; a ship that leaves port with only a few rats in it is apt to come back with an army of them aboard. The span of life is between three and five years, although now and then one may live somewhat longer; a rat at four is older than a man at ninety. Exterminators refer to old rats as Moby Dicks. "Rats that survive to the age of four are the wisest and the most cynical beasts

on earth," one exterminator says. "A trap means nothing to them, no matter how skillfully set. They just kick it around until it snaps; then they eat the bait. And they can detect poisoned bait a yard off. I believe some of them can read. If you get a few Moby Dicks in your house, there are just two things you can do: you can wait for them to die, or you can burn your house down and start all over again." In fighting the rat, exterminating companies use a wide variety of traps, gases, and poisons. There are about three hundred of these companies in the city, ranging in size from hole-in-the-wall, boss-and-a-helper outfits to corporations with whole floors in midtown office buildings, large laboratories, and staffs of carefully trained employees, many of whom have scientific degrees. One of the largest is the Guarantee Exterminating Company ("America's Pied Piper"), at 500 Fifth Avenue. Among its clients are hospitals, steamship lines, railroad terminals, department stores, office buildings, hotels, and apartment houses. Its head is E. R. Jennings, a second-generation exterminator; his father started the business in Chicago, in 1888. Mr. Jennings says that the most effective rat traps are the old-fashioned snap or break-back ones and a thing called the glueboard.

"We swear by the glueboard," he says. "It's simply a composition shingle smeared on one side with a thick, strong, black glue. We developed this glue twenty-five years ago and it's probably the stickiest stuff known to man. It has been widely copied in the trade and is used all over. The shingle is pliable. It can be laid flat on the floor or bent around a pipe. We place them on rat runs—the paths rats customarily travel on—and that's where skill comes in; you have to be an expert to locate the rat runs. We lay bait around the boards. If any part of the animal touches a board, he's done for. When he tries to pull away, he gets himself firmly caught in the glue. The more he struggles, the more firmly he's stuck. Next morning the rat, glueboard and all, is picked up with tongs and burned. We used to bait with ground beef, canned salmon, and cheese, but when rationing came in we did some experimenting with many other foods and discovered, to our great surprise, that peanut butter is an extremely effective rat bait. Rats have to be trapped, poisoned, or gassed. Cats are worthless. They can handle mice, and do, but an adult brown rat will rip the hide off any cat. Ferrets aren't used against rats in New York any more, but exterminators in Philadelphia have to always keep a pair on hand. Some of the old families down there insist on that method. Personally, I like a ferret about as much as I like a rat.

"Insects, particularly the cockroach and the bedbug, are the No. 1 exterminating problem in New York. Rats come next. Then mice. Perhaps I shouldn't tell this, but most good exterminators despise rat jobs because they know that exterminating by itself is ineffective. You can kill all the rats in a building on a Monday and come back on a Wednesday and find it crawling with them. The only way rats can be kept out is to ratproof the building from sub-basement to skylight. It's an architectural problem; you have to build them out. Killing them off periodically is a waste of time; it's like taking aspirin for a cancer. We refuse to take a rat job unless the owner or tenant promises to stop up every hole and crack through which rats can get entrance and seal up or eliminate any spaces inside the building in which they can nest. That may sound like cutting our own throats, but don't worry: insects are here to stay and we'll always have more work than we can do. Rats are on the increase right now, especially the black rat. The other day I saw some blacks in an El station in uptown Manhattan. Use to, you'd find them only on the waterfront. People don't have time to attend to rats with a war on. After the war, we'll pick up the slack. Twenty-five years ago there were easily two rats for every human in the city. They gradually decreased to half that, for many reasons. Better sanitary conditions in general is one reason. Fewer horses and fewer stables is another. The improved packaging of foods helped a lot. An increase in the power of the Department of Health is an important reason. Nowadays, if a health inspector finds rat tracks in a grocery or a restaurant, all he has to do is issue a warning; if things aren't cleaned

"Smash leaf. Smash plant head. Smash root. Smash fish head. Add sour deer milk. I call it 'dip.'"

up in a hurry, he can slap on a violation and make it stick. The most important reason, however, is the modern construction of buildings and the widespread use of concrete. It's almost impossible for a rat to get inside some of the newer apartment houses and office buildings in the city. If he gets in, there's no place for him to hide and breed. Take the Empire State Building, which I know intimately. There's never been a rat in it, not a single, solitary one."

None of the rats in New York are indigenous to this country. The black rat has been here longest. Its homeland is India. It spread to Europe in the Middle Ages along trade routes, and historians are quite sure that it was brought to America by the first ships that moored here. It is found in every seaport in the United States, and inland chiefly in the Gulf States. It has bluish-black fur, a pointed nose, and big ears. It is cleaner and not as fierce as the brown rat but more suspicious and harder to trap. It is an acrobatic beast. It can rapidly climb a drapery, a perpendicular drain or steam-heat pipe, an elevator cable, or a telephone or electric wire. It can gnaw a hole in a ceiling while clinging to an electric wire. It can run fleetly on a taut wire, or on a rope whether slack or taut. It uses its tail, which is slightly longer than its body, to maintain balance. It nests in attics, ceilings, and hollow walls, and in the superstructures of piers, away from its enemy, the ground-loving brown rat. Not all piers are infested; a few of the newer ones, which are largely of concrete, have none at all. It keeps close to the waterfront, and until recently was rarely come across in the interior of the city. Whenever possible, it goes aboard ships to live. While docked here, all ships are required to keep three-foot metal discs, called rat guards, set on their hawsers and mooring cables. These guards sometimes get out of whack—a strong wind may tilt them, for example—and then a black or an Alexandrian can easily clamber over them. Occasionally a rat will walk right up or down a gangplank. It is almost impossible to keep a ship entirely free of them. Some famous ships are notoriously ratty. One beautiful liner—it was in the round-the-world cruise service before the war—once came in with two hundred and fifty aboard. Public Health Service officials look upon a medium-sized ship with twenty as excessively infested. The record for New York Harbor is held by a freighter that came in from an Oriental port with six hundred, all blacks and Alexandrians.

The black and the Alexandrian belong to the same species, their appearance and habits are alike, and the untrained eye cannot tell them apart. The Alexandrian is frequently found on ships from Mediterranean ports. It is a native of Egypt, and no one seems to know, even approximately, when it first appeared in this country. It has never been able to get more than a toehold in New York, but it is abundant in some Southern and Gulf ports.

The brown rat, the *R. norvegicus*, originated somewhere in Central Asia, began to migrate westward early in the eighteenth century, and reached England around 1730. Most authorities believe that it got to this country during the Revolutionary War. From ports all along the coast it went inland, hot on the heels of the early settlers, and now it thrives in every community and on practically every farm in the United States. Its spread was slowest in the high and dry regions of the West; it didn't reach Wyoming until 1919 and Montana until 1923. It has a blunt nose, small ears, and feverish, evil, acutely intelligent eyes. Its fur is most often a grimy brown, but it may vary from a pepper-and-salt gray to nearly black. Partial albinos occasionally show up; the tame white rat, which is used as a laboratory animal and sometimes kept as a pet, is a sport derived from the brown.

In addition to being the most numerous, the brown rat is the dirtiest, the fiercest, and the biggest. "The untrained observer," a Public Health Service doctor remarked not long ago, "invariably spreads his hands wide apart when reporting the size of a rat he has seen, indicating that it was somewhat smaller than a stud horse but a whole lot bigger than a bulldog. They are big enough, God protect us, without exaggerating." The average length of adult brown rats is a foot and five inches, including the

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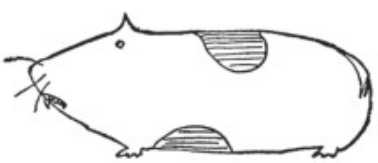
tail, which is seven inches. The average weight is three-quarters of a pound. Once in a while a much heavier one is trapped. One that weighed a pound and a half and measured a foot and eight and a half inches overall was recently clubbed to death in a Manhattan brewery; brewery and distillery rats feed on mash and many become obese and clumsy. Some exterminators have maintained for years that the biggest rats in the country, perhaps in the world, are found in New York, Jersey City, Washington, and San Francisco, but biologists believe that this is just a notion, that they don't get any bigger in one city than they do in another. The black and the Alexandrian are about two-thirds the size of the brown.

The brown rat is distributed all over the five boroughs. It customarily nests at or below street level—under floors, in rubbishy basements, and in burrows. There are many brownstones and redbricks, as well as many commercial structures, in the city that have basements or sub-basements with dirt floors; these places are rat heavens. The brown rat can burrow into the hardest soil, even tightly packed clay, and it can tunnel through the kind of cheap mortar that is made of sand and lime. To get from one basement to another, it tunnels under party walls; slum-clearance workers frequently uncover a network of rat tunnels that link all the tenements in a block. Like the magpie, it steals and hoards small gadgets and coins. In nest chambers in a system of tunnels under a Chelsea tenement, workers recently found an empty lipstick tube, a religious medal, a skate key, a celluloid teething ring, a belt buckle, a shoehorn, several books of matches in which all the match heads had been eaten off, a penny, a dime, and three quarters. Paper money is sometimes found. When the Civic Repertory Theatre was torn down, a nest constructed solely of dollar bills, seventeen in all, was discovered in a burrow. Exterminators believe that most fires of undetermined origin in the city are started by rats. "They are the worst firebugs in creation," one says. "They set some fires by gnawing the insulation off electric wiring, but their passion for match eating is what causes the most damage. They often use highly inflammable material in building nests. For example, the majority of the nests in the neighborhood of a big garage will invariably be built of oily cotton rags. Let a rat bring some matches into such a nest, particularly one that's right beneath a wooden floor, and let him ignite a match while gnawing on it, and a few minutes later here come the fire wagons."

The brown rat is as supple as rubber and it can squeeze and contort itself through openings half its size. It has strong jaws and long, curved incisors with sharp cutting edges. It can gnaw a notch big enough to accommodate its body in an oak plank, a slate shingle, or a sun-dried brick. Attracted by the sound of running water, it will gnaw into lead pipe. It cannot climb as skillfully as the black and the Alexandrian, it cannot jump as far, and it is not as fleet, but it is, for its size, a remarkable swimmer. A Harbor Police launch once came upon three brown rats, undoubtedly from New Jersey, in the middle of the Hudson; in an hour and twenty-five minutes, swimming against the wind in tossing water, they reached the pilings of one of the Barclay Street ferry slips, where the policemen shot them. The brown rat is an omnivorous scavenger, and it doesn't seem to care at all whether its food is fresh or spoiled. It will eat soap, oil paints, shoe leather, the bone of a bone-handled knife, the glue in a book binding, and the rubber in the insulation of telephone and electric wires. It can go for days without food, and it can obtain sufficient water by licking condensed moisture off metallic surfaces. All rats are vandals, but



the brown is the most ruthless. It destroys far more than it actually consumes. Instead of completely eating a few potatoes, it takes a bite or two out of dozens. It will methodically ruin all the apples and pears in a grocery in a night, gnawing on a few and then cutting into the others for the seeds. To get a small quantity of nesting material, it will cut great quantities of garments, rugs, upholstery, and books to tatters. In a big warehouse, it goes berserk. In a few hours a herd will rip holes in hundreds of sacks of flour, grain, coffee, and other foodstuffs, spilling and fouling the contents and making a wholesale mess. It sometimes seems that only deep hatred of the human race could cause the rat to be so destructive. Every January, the biologists of the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior get together and make an estimate of the amount of damage done during the past year by rats. Their estimate for the country in 1943 was two hundred million dollars.

In live-poultry markets a lust for blood seems to take hold of the brown rat. One night, in the old Gansevoort wholesale-poultry market, alongside the Hudson in Greenwich Village, a burrow of them bit the throats of three hundred and twenty-five broilers and ate less than a dozen. Before the Gansevoort market was abandoned, in 1942, the rats practically had charge of it. In three sheds, four thousand were trapped. They nested in the drawers of desks and leaped out, snarling, when the drawers were pulled open. Exterminators have occasionally been perplexed at finding eggshells and even unbroken eggs in brown-rat burrows under poultry markets and butter-and-egg warehouses. Irving Billig, president of the Biocerta Corporation, which makes pest poisons, at 303 Fifth Avenue, claims that he found out not long ago how the rats transport these eggs. Now and then Mr. Billig takes on a big exterminating job. The city once hired him to quell the rats in Central Park and in the dumps on Riker's Island. For a hobby, he hides in food establishments at night and studies the feeding habits of rats. "I'll swear to this," he says. "One night, in the warehouse of a grocery chain, I saw some egg-stealing rats at work. They worked in pairs. A small rat would straddle an egg and clutch it in his four paws. When he got a good grip on it, he'd roll over on his back. Then a bigger rat would grab him by the tail and drag him across the floor to a hole in the baseboard, a hole leading to a burrow. The big rat would slowly back into the hole, pulling the small one, the one with the egg, in after him." In an East River slaughterhouse, Mr. Billig once witnessed another example of the ingenuity of the *norvegicus*. "I'll swear to this, also," he says. "This place had a bad problem and I was called in

to study it. I hid in a room where there were some sides of beef hung on hooks, about three feet clear of the floor. Around eleven P.M. the rats started wriggling in. In fifteen minutes there were around two hundred in the room. They began jumping for the beeves, but they couldn't reach them. Presently they congregated under one beef and formed a sort of pyramid with their bodies. The pyramid was high enough for one rat to jump up on the beef. He gnawed it loose from the hook, it tumbled to the floor, and the two hundred rats went to work on it." After telling about this, Mr. Billig shudders and says, "A sight like that leaves a mark on a man. If the rats come out of their holes by the millions some night and take over City Hall and start running the city, I won't be the least bit surprised. A few more world wars, a couple of epidemics of the bubonic plague, and the Machine Age'll be done for; it'll turn into the Rat Age."

So far, in the United States, the plague has been only a menace. From 1898 to 1923, 10,822,331 deaths caused by the plague were recorded in India alone; in the United States, in this period, there were fewer than three hundred deaths. The plague first occurred in this country in 1900, in the Chinatown of San Francisco. It is generally believed that the bacteria were brought in by a herd of infected rats that climbed to the docks from an old ship in the Far Eastern trade. This epidemic killed a hundred and thirteen people and lasted until the end of 1903. The plague broke out again in 1907, a year after the earthquake. In the same year there was an epidemic in Seattle. There have been two epidemics in New Orleans—one in 1914 and one in 1919 and 1920—and there was one in Los Angeles in 1924 and 1925. Since then there have been only sporadic cases. However, there is a vast and ominous reservoir of plague infection in the wild rodents of the West. During the first epidemic in San Francisco, many rats fled the city and infected field rodents, chiefly ground squirrels, in the suburbs. In 1934, thirty years later, Public Health Service biologists turned up the fact that the plague had slowly spread among burrowing animals—ground squirrels, prairie dogs, chipmunks, and others—as far east as New Mexico and Wyoming. Late last year it appeared fifty miles inside the western border of North Dakota. Public Health Service officials say that there is no reason to assume that the infection will not infiltrate into rodents of the Great Plains, cross the Mississippi, and show up in the East. Most of the diseased rodents inhabit thinly settled sections and come in contact with human beings infrequently. Even so, every year several people, usually hunters, are bitten by infected rodent fleas and come down with the plague. Epidemiologists are greatly disturbed by the situation, particularly because there is an ever-present possibility that a few infected rodents may stray from rural areas and transfer the disease to town and city rats, settling an old score. If the disease gets loose among city rats, epidemics among human beings will probably follow.

There has never been an outbreak of the plague in New York. There have, however, been two narrow escapes. In 1900, plague-infected rats were found in ships in the harbor of New York, as well as in the harbors of San Francisco and Port Townsend, Washington. They got ashore only in San Francisco, causing the first Black Death epidemic in North America. Plague rats were found in New York Harbor for the second time early in January of last year. Among themselves, health officials have already got in the habit of referring to this discovery as "the Wyoming affair." The history of the Wyoming affair was told to me the other day by Dr. Robert Olesen, medical director of the New York Quarantine Station of the Public Health Service, whose office is in an old, red-brick building overlooking The Narrows, in Rosebank, on Staten Island.

"I suppose there can be no harm in telling about it now," Dr. Olesen said. "First, it's necessary to explain how we inspect ships. Every ship in foreign trade that comes into the harbor is boarded by a party made up of a customs officer, an immigration officer, a plant-quarantine man from the Department of Agriculture, a Public Health doctor, and a sanitary inspector, whose main job is to determine the degree of rat infestation aboard. While the doctor is examining the crew and passengers for quarantinable diseases, the sanitary inspector goes through the ship looking for rat gnawings, tracks, droppings, nests, and

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for the presence of rat odor. An experienced inspector can smell rats. He pays particular attention to ships that have touched at plague ports. There are quite a few of these ports right now; Suez had an outbreak the other day and was put on the list. After he's made his search, he reports to the doctor, who orders a fumigation if things look bad. If infestation is slight and if the ship comes from a clean port, the doctor probably won't insist on a fumigation. I won't give you any wartime figures, but in one peacetime month, for example, we inspected five hundred and sixty ships, found that a hundred and thirty-two were infested to some degree, and fumigated twenty-four, recovering eight hundred and ten rats. Ships make rapid turnarounds nowadays, and it often happens that the time required for a fumigation will cause a ship to miss a convoy.

"We are short-handed, and most of our fumigating is done by a group of twenty-two Coast Guardsmen. They were assigned to us early in the war and we trained them to make rat inspections and fumigations. We use hydrocyanic gas, which has a pleasant, peach-blossom smell and is one of the most lethal of poisons. An infested ship is anchored and a fumigation party of four or five Coast Guardsmen goes aboard. First, they send the entire crew ashore, carefully checking them off one by one. Then one of the Coast Guardsmen goes through the ship, shouting, banging on bulkheads with a wrench, and making as much racket as possible. He shouts, 'Danger! Fumigation! Poison gas!' Then the Coast Guardsmen put on gas masks and toss some tear-gas bombs into the holds. That's to fetch out any stowaways who might be aboard. During the first months we used hydrocyanic, we killed a number of stowaways. A few weeks ago, in the hold of a South American freighter, the tear gas brought out eight weeping stowaways who had been hiding in an empty water tank. Two fellows in the crew had smuggled them aboard in Buenos Aires and had been feeding them. These fellows had kept their mouths shut and gone ashore, leaving the stowaways to be killed, for all they cared. When the Coast Guardsmen are satisfied a ship is empty of humans, they seal the holds and cabins and open cans of hydrocyanic, liberating the gas. They even fumigate the lifeboats; rats often hide in them. After a certain number of hours—ten for a medium-sized ship—the holds are opened and aired out, and the Coast Guardsmen go below and search for dead rats. The rats are dropped in oil-paper bags and brought to a laboratory in the basement here. They are combed for fleas. The fleas are pounded in a mortar, put in a solution, and injected into guinea pigs. Then each rat is autopsied and examined for signs of plague. Then bits of spleens and livers are snipped out, pooled, and pounded up. They are also put into a solution and injected into guinea pigs. If the fleas or the rats are infected, the pigs sicken and die. We began this work in 1921, and for twenty-two years we injected hundreds of generations of pigs with the fleas and spleens of rats from practically every port in the world without turning up a single Black Death germ. We didn't want to find any, to be sure, but there *were* days when we couldn't help but look upon our work as routine and futile.

"Now then, late in the evening of January 10, 1943, the French steamship Wyoming arrived from Casablanca, Africa, with a miscellaneous cargo, chiefly wine, tobacco, and vegetable seeds. A big convoy came in that evening, sixty or seventy ships, and we didn't get to the Wyoming until next day. Casablanca was on the plague list at that time; there had been an outbreak in December, shortly before the Wyoming sailed. The crew was carefully examined. No sign of illness. Then the captain brought out a deratization certificate stating that the ship had recently been fumigated and was free of rats; this certificate later turned out to be worthless. She was allowed to dock at Pier 34, Brooklyn, where she discharged some bags of mail. Next day she proceeded to Pier 84, Hudson River, and began discharging her cargo. Some rats were seen in her by longshoremen, and on January 13th we went over her and found evidence of infestation. She was allowed to continue unloading. On January 18th we fumigated her at her dock and found twenty rats. We combed and autopsied the rats, and inoculated a guinea pig. Four days later the pig sickened and died. An autopsy indicated plague infection and cultures from its heart blood showed an oval organism which had all the characteristics of *Pasteurella pestis*. We made a broth of tissue from this pig and inoculated a second pig. It sickened and died. It was the Black Death, no doubt about it. We had found it in the harbor for the first time in forty-three years.

"In the meantime, the Wyoming had moved from the Hudson to Pier 25, Staten Island, for repairs. On January 29th we went aboard her, removed all excess dunnage and gear to the decks, and ripped open all the enclosed spaces in the holds; we were afraid the hydrocyanic hadn't penetrated to these spaces. Then we refumigated. Twelve more dead rats were found. On the same day we got in touch with Dr. Stebbins, the Commissioner of Health for the city, and told him about the situation. We were greatly apprehensive. The Wyoming had touched at piers in rat-infested sections in three boroughs and there was, of course, a distinct possibility that infected rats had got ashore and were at that moment wandering around the waterfront, coming in contact with local rats and exchanging fleas. Mr. Holsendorf, the Health Department's rat consultant, quickly got together some crews of trappers and they began setting break-back traps on the Brooklyn pier, the Manhattan pier, and the Staten Island pier, and in buildings in the vicinity of each pier. The trapping was done unobtrusively; we were afraid a newspaper might learn of the matter and start a plague scare. Early in February the first batch of rats was sent for autopsies to the laboratory of the Willard Parker Hospital, an institution for contagious diseases, at the foot of East Fifteenth Street. We waited for the report with considerable anxiety. It was negative on every rat, and we began to breathe easier. Mr. Holsendorf and his crews trapped from the end of January to the middle of May and the reports continued to come in negative. At the end of May we concluded that no Wyoming rats had got ashore, and that the city was safe."

"How many rats did you find on the Wyoming the next time it came in," I asked.

"The Wyoming's number was up," Dr. Olesen said. "Shortly after the second fumigation she went back to sea. Two days out, on her way to Casablanca, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine." ♦

BUZZED

BY NOAH BAUMBACH

To learn more about the biochemistry of addiction, scientists in Australia dropped liquefied freebase cocaine on bees' backs, so it entered the circulatory system and brain.

The scientists found that bees react much like humans do: cocaine alters their judgment, stimulates their behavior and makes them exaggeratedly enthusiastic about things that might not otherwise excite them.

—*The Times.*

Oh, my God, get over here . . . hurry . . . *come on come on come on*. Taste this nectar, taste it, taste it. . . . *Slurp*. . . . Is that not, is that not the best fucking thing you've ever had? Like nectar of the fucking Gods! It's like the greatest hits of nectar. A double-album greatest hits, like those red and blue Beatles records where they're looking down at us off a balcony but they have facial hair in one of them. Oh, my God, I just flew over to this, to this lily. Look at me on the lily?! Is that not, is that not so weird? I'm like buzzing around and then I land. . . . I don't know why that struck me as so odd just then. My little feet on the petal. Is that odd? It seems so funny to me. Oh, my God, you gotta try this pollen. It's so fucking . . . it's better than the nectar, even. This is the best fucking pollen I've *ever had*. God, I so badly wanna just go sting the fuck out of someone, you know? Just land on their ass and *sting*. . . . I'm so fucking jazzed right now. And then I hope they're allergic and they just blow up! We gotta get out of this hive, we gotta get mobile . . . "Going Mobile"! The Who was a good band. Let's go find a picnic or some sunbathers or something. . . . I'd love some coconut suntan lotion or a . . . beer. Wouldn't you love a six-pack of Stella Artois right now? That's the best beer. Stel-la! That was actually a pretty good imitation, don't you think? The guy who played him in the movie, the "Streetcar" . . . who am I thinking of? It's on the tip of my . . . Jesus, what's wrong with me I can't come up with this dude's name? . . . Or how about, how about: a coconut Stella Artois beer?! Wouldn't that be the best and you could spread it all over your body and it's U.V. 1,000 or 1,000 proof or something. God, I want to *sting* someone. . . . Oh, my God, my antennae are like supersensitive right now. . . . Don't . . . don't touch . . . I said *don't!* It's O.K., it's cool, it's cool. You see that little bee . . . you see that little drone? *Trigona minima! Amo*, *amas*, *amat*. Let's go over and beat the living crap out of him. I don't know why, but I just *hate* him right now. He's so small and smug. . . . Look at that bee . . . just look at him. . . . Oh, my God, there's a picnic. Let's totally go there right now. . . . I think this fat kid's allergic . . . I'm so going to sting him! Oh, my God, he's totally swatting me . . . did you see that dude's face! Fucking hilarious. He was all, like, "It's a bee, it's a bee!" And his mom was all, like, "Don't aggravate him!" Aggravate him is *right!* I'll go ballistic on you, tubby! Marlon Brando! Stel-la! Got it. I'm on fire. Let's do another line. I don't know, behind that hibiscus, I don't give a fuck. What do you mean, I did the last of it? I just need a bump. We should totally fly downtown, score some more blow, and get back here before the picnic breaks up and then do more coke. God, I'd kill for a cigarette. I'm gonna start smoking, I know, I know, but I look so fucking debonair when I do it. I wish we had some tunes. Early Van Halen or . . . you know what would be perfect right now? The Smiths. I'm serious. "Girlfriend in a coma, I know, I know, it's serious." There's that yellow jacket, Devin, by the potato salad. Do you think he's got any blow? He's a great guy, just a really great laid-back kinda no-cares-in-the-world but totally together guy and very funny but easygoing and totally disarming and I think he'd really appreciate our sort of world view and be a nice addition to our hive. . . . I'm totally fucking with you! He's a total prick. Let's kick the shit out of him and steal his coke. There's that fat kid again. I'm going to sting this whole family! "Aah!" They're running! I'm buzzing, I'm buzzing, I'm buzzing, this is incredible. I'm in the car! I'm in the car. I'm in the *car!* Everyone's screaming and flailing and . . . this is lame, get me out. . . . I'll fly out this window and . . . Ow! Wait a minute, and . . . Ow! Ow! Ow! What the fuck? It's like a . . . ow! . . . clear force field. . . . Whoa, I just totally accidentally stung the mother. . . . Sorry, but you're like moving so much and this force field is killing me. . . . Ow. . . . Oh, wait, the force field is rolling down and . . . Ahh! Did you see me? I was totally in a moving car. So crazy. Wait, wait, head rush. I'm woozy. I gotta sit, I gotta . . . Where's a pistil or a stamen when you need one? . . . This spilled soda will do for the moment. . . . Wait, slow down, slow down, slow down. . . . My heart is racing . . . gotta relax . . . gotta . . . say something soothing . . . I don't know . . . talk about honey or strawberry jam. . . . I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die. . . . Where'd you get this shit? I think it's laced with insecticide or something. . . . My heart is going like a mile a millisecond. It's going to burst through my thorax and all over the jacarandas. Ha! Stop making me laugh, stop it, stop it, I got pollen coming out of my nose. I need to sit down . . . I need . . . I can't do this again . . . this is the last time, really . . . no, I mean it. . . . From now on, nothing stronger than honey. Jesus, the sun's going down, where'd the day go, you wanna get dinner, I'm not getting any sleep tonight. ♦

LAURIE ROSENWALD

PETS ALLOWED

Why are so many animals now in places where they shouldn't be?

BY PATRICIA MARX

The author takes an alpaca to the drugstore.

What a wonderful time it is for the scammer, the conniver, and the cheat: the underage drinkers who flash fake I.D.s, the able-bodied adults who drive cars with handicapped license plates, the parents who use a phony address so that their child can attend a more desirable public school, the customers with eleven items who stand in the express lane. The latest group to bend the law is pet owners.

Take a look around. See the St. Bernard slobbering over the shallots at Whole Foods? Isn't that a Rottweiler sitting third row, mezzanine, at Carnegie Hall? As you will have observed, an increasing number of your neighbors have been keeping company with their pets in human-only establishments, cohabiting with them in animal-unfriendly apartment buildings and dormitories, and taking them (free!) onto airplanes—simply by claiming that the creatures are their licensed companion animals and are necessary to their mental well-being. No government agency keeps track of such figures, but in 2011 the National Service Animal Registry, a commercial enterprise that sells certificates, vests, and badges for helper animals, signed up twenty-four hundred emotional-support animals. Last year, it registered eleven thousand.

What about the mental well-being of everyone else? One person's emotional support can be another person's emotional trauma. Last May, for instance, a woman brought her large service dog, Truffles, on a US Airways flight from Los Angeles to Philadelphia. At thirty-five thousand feet, the dog squatted in the aisle and, according to Chris Law, a passenger who tweeted about the incident, "did what dogs do." After the second, ahem, installment, the crew ran out of detergent and paper towels. "Plane is emergency landing cuz ppl are getting sick," Law tweeted. "Hazmat team needs to board." The woman and Truffles disembarked, to applause, in Kansas City, and she offered her inconvenienced fellow-passengers Starbucks gift cards.

In June, a miniature Yorkie caused a smaller stir, at a fancy Manhattan restaurant. From a Google review of Altesi Ristorante: "Lunch was ruined because Ivana Trump sat next to us with her dog which she even let climb to the table. I told her no dogs allowed but she lied that hers was a service dog." I called the owner of Altesi, Paolo Alavian, who defended Trump. "She walked into the restaurant and she showed the emotional-support card," he said. "Basically, people with the card are allowed to bring their dogs into the restaurant. This is the law."

Alavian is mistaken about that. Contrary to what many business managers think, having an emotional-support card merely means that one's pet is registered in a database of animals whose owners have paid anywhere from seventy to two hundred dollars to one of several organizations, none of which are recognized by the government. (You could register a Beanie Baby, as long as you send a check.) Even with a card, it is against the law and a violation of the city's health code to take an animal into a restaurant. Nor does an emotional-support card entitle you to bring your pet into a hotel, store, taxi, train, or park.

No such restrictions apply to service dogs, which, like Secret Service agents and Betty White, are allowed to go anywhere. In contrast to an emotional-support animal (E.S.A.), a service dog is trained to perform specific tasks, such as pulling a wheelchair and responding to seizures. The I.R.S. classifies these dogs as a deductible medical expense, whereas an emotional-support animal is more like a blankie. An E.S.A. is defined by the government as an untrained companion of any species that provides solace to someone with a disability, such as anxiety or depression. The rights of anyone who has such an animal are laid out in two laws. The Fair Housing Act

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBIN SIEGEL

says that you and your E.S.A. can live in housing that prohibits pets. The Air Carrier Access Act entitles you to fly with your E.S.A. at no extra charge, although airlines typically require the animal to stay on your lap or under the seat—this rules out emotional-support rhinoceroses. Both acts stipulate that you must have a corroborating letter from a health professional.

Fortunately for animal-lovers who wish to abuse the law, there is a lot of confusion about just who and what is allowed where. I decided to go undercover as a person with an anxiety disorder (not a stretch) and run around town with five un-cuddly, non-nurturing animals for which I obtained E.S.A. credentials (one animal at a time; I'm not that crazy). You should know that I am not in the habit of breaking (I mean, exploiting) the law, and, as far as animals go, I like them—medium rare.

The first animal I test-drove was a fifteen-pound, thirteen-inch turtle. I tethered it to a rabbit leash, to which I had stapled a cloth E.S.A. badge (purchased on Amazon), and set off for the Frick Collection.

"One, please," I said to the woman selling tickets, who appeared not to notice the reptile writhing in my arms, even though people in line were taking photos of us with their cell phones. I petted the turtle's feet. "Just a moment," the woman said. "Let me get someone."

"Oh, my God," I heard one guard say to another. "That woman has a turtle. I'll call security."

"Is it a real turtle?" Guard No. 2 said to Guard No. 1. Minutes passed. A man in a uniform appeared.

"No, no, no. You can't take in an animal," he said.

"It's an emotional-support animal," I said.

"Nah."

"I have a letter," I said.

"You have a letter? Let me see it," he said, with the peremptoriness you might have found at Checkpoint Charlie. Here are some excerpts from the letter, which I will tell you more about later, when I introduce you to my snake:

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Patricia Marx

Ms. Marx has been evaluated for and diagnosed with a mental health disorder as defined in the DSM-5. Her psychological condition affects daily life activities, ability to cope, and maintenance of psychological stability. It also can influence her physical status.

Ms. Marx has a turtle that provides significant emotional support, and ameliorates the severity of symptoms that affect her daily ability to fulfill her responsibilities and goals. Without the companionship, support, and caretaking activities of her turtle, her mental health and daily living activities are compromised. In my opinion, it is a necessary component of treatment to foster improved psychological adjustment, support functional living activities, her well being, productivity in work and home responsibilities, and amelioration of the severity of psychological issues she experiences in some specific situations to have an Emotional Support Animal (ESA).

She has registered her pet with the Emotional Support Animal Registration of America. This letter further supports her pet as an ESA, which entitles her to the rights and benefits legitimized by the Fair Housing Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It allows exceptions to housing, and transportation services that otherwise would limit her from being able to be accompanied by her emotional support animal.

The Frick man read the letter and disappeared, returning with another uniformed man, to whom he said, "She has a letter."

"Can I see it, please?" the new man said. He read the letter, then looked up. "How old is he?" he said.

"Seven," I answered.

The Frick does not admit children younger than ten, but evidently the rule does not apply to turtles, because the man gestured welcomingly, and the turtle and I went and had a look at the Vermeers.

"Big for seven, isn't he?" the man said.

I wouldn't know. Turtle (her actual name) is a red-eared slider who lives in Brooklyn, the property of a former mail carrier who was kind enough to lend her to me for the day.

On her inaugural visit to Manhattan, Turtle and I also made stops at Christian Louboutin, where she cozied up to a glittery $6,395 stiletto, and I, trying to snap a photo, was told, "Turtles are allowed, but no photography"; E.A.T., the high-end delicatessen, where I had a bowl of borscht and the turtle hydrated from, and also in, a dish of water provided by our waiter; NK Hair Salon, where a manicurist agreed to give Turtle a pedicure for an upcoming bar mitzvah ("You'll have to hold her toes down under the dryer"); Maison du Chocolat; and the Frank E. Campbell Funeral Chapel, to inquire whether I could pre-pay for the turtle's burial. "But it will outlive us all," a sombrely dressed representative said in a sombre consultation room.

Why didn't anybody do the sensible thing, and tell me and my turtle to get lost? The Americans with Disabilities Act allows you to ask someone with a service animal only two questions: Is the animal required because of a disability? What work or task has the animal been trained to perform? Specific questions about a person's disability are off limits, and, as I mentioned, people are baffled by the distinction between service animals and emotional-support animals.

Len Kain, the editor-in-chief of dog-friendly.com, a Web site that features pet-travel tips, said, "The law is fuzzy. If you ask one too many questions, you're in legal trouble for violating the Americans with Disabilities Act and could face fines of up to a hundred thousand dollars. But, if you ask one too few questions, you're probably not in trouble, and at worst will be given a slap on the wrist."

If you want to turn your pet into a certified E.S.A., all you need is a therapist type who will vouch for your mental un-health. Don't have one? Enter "emotional-support animal" into Google and take your pick among hundreds of willing professionals. Through a site called ESA Registration of America, I found a clinical social worker in California who, at a cost of a hundred and forty dollars, agreed to evaluate me over the phone to discuss the role of Augustus, the snake, in my life. To prepare for the session, I concocted a harrowing backstory: When I was six, I fell into a pond and almost drowned. There was a snake in the water that I grabbed on to just before I was rescued by my father, and, ever since, I'd found comfort in scaly vertebrates.

"Now, let's talk about your problems," the therapist said, in the sort of soothing voice you might use when speaking to someone who has one day to live. "What's your snake's name?"

"Augustus," I said.

"How does Augustus help you with your problems?"

"How far back should I go?" I asked,

"As usual, my opponent is playing the quicksand card while ignoring the real issues facing ordinary people today."

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itching to tell my story about the pond.

"Just the last six months," she said.

"Um, he provides unconditional love, and I feel safe when he's around," I said. "He's a good icebreaker, too, if I'm feeling shy."

"You want to have more ease outside the house," the therapist summed up. "Now I want to do a generalized-anxiety screening with you," she said. "In the last fourteen days, have you felt anxious or on edge nearly every day, more than seven days, or less than seven days?"

"I'd say around seven," I replied. Using the same parameters, she asked me to rate my worrying, trouble relaxing, ability to sit still, irritability, and dread that something awful might happen. The next day, I received the following e-mail:

> Hi Patricia:
> It was my pleasure to speak to you today.
> Attached is your ESA letter.
> Enjoy the benefits of having your dog (sic) with you more now.
> All the best,

I'd better come clean. This was the only time I was evaluated. On my other outings with animals, I brandished a doctored version of the original snake letter. (If talking seems too last-century, you can consult thedogtor.net, where getting your E.S.A. certified is "only a mouse-click away." You fill out a seventy-four-question medical exam online and receive your paperwork within two days, for just a hundred and ninety dollars.)

So I was off to SoHo to be put at ease by a Mexican milk snake named Augustus, which I borrowed from a friend. With his penchant for coiling all thirty inches of himself around my neck and face, he felt less like an animal than like an emotional-support accessory—say, a scarf. He is the diameter of a garden hose, as smooth as an old wallet, and gorgeously marked with bands of yellow, black, and rusty red. As I walked down Wooster Street, Augustus tickled my ear and then started to slither down my blouse. (Men!) His owner had warned me, "He is good for parting the crowd on a busy midtown sidewalk," and she was right.

"Look, a snake," I heard a young woman say to her boyfriend, as we passed on our way to an apartment open house on West Broadway. A moment later, I heard a yelp and a splat, and turned around to see that the startled fellow had dropped his can of soda. The real-estate agent, by contrast, went on about the granite countertop and the home office that could be converted to a nursery, but ignored the snake, which had got stuck in my hair tie. Maybe a serpent is one of those things that it's best to put up with when you're trying to sell a $5.2-million three-bedroom.

Here's what happened at the Chanel boutique: "Hello. I'm looking for a pocketbook that will match my snake," I said to a salesman. "Maybe something in reptile." I shuffled Augustus from one hand to the other as though he were a Slinky.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, I have a thing against snakes, so let me get someone else to assist you," he said, as if he were telling the host at a dinner party, "No dessert for me, thank you."

A colleague appeared. "Wow," he said, leading me to a display case. "We do have snakeskin bags back here. Is he nice? Does he bite?" The salesman handed me a smart, yellow python bag marked $9,000. "I think this would work the best. It's one of our classics. I think yellow. Red makes the snake look too dull."

The welcome wasn't as warm at Mercer Kitchen, where a maître d' responded to my request for a table by saying, "Not with that!"

"But it's a companion animal," I said. "It's against the law not to let me in."

"I understand," he said. "But I need you to take that out."

Over at Balthazar, once the woman at the front desk confirmed with her superior that snakes could count as emotional-support animals, I was able to make a lunch reservation for the following week. ("So that's how you get a table there," a friend said.) An hour later, I learned that the Angelika Film Center does not require you to purchase a separate ticket for your snake, and that the Nespresso coffee bar is much too cold for an ectotherm.

To think that animals were once merely our dinner, or what we wore to dinner! Fifteen thousand years ago, certain wolves became domesticated and evolved into dogs. One thing led to another, and, notwithstanding some moments in history that dogs and cats would probably not want to bring up (like the time Pope Gregory IX declared cats to be the Devil incarnate), pets have gradually become cherished members of our families. According to "Citizen Canine," a book by David Grimm, sixty-seven per cent of households in America have a cat or a dog (compared with forty-three per cent who have children), and eighty-three per cent of pet owners refer to themselves as their animal's "mom" or "dad." Seventy per cent celebrate the pet's birthday. Animals are our best friends, our children, and our therapists.

"I hate all of these people," Jerry Saltz, the art critic for *New York*, told me, referring to pet owners "who can't be alone without their dogs or who feel guilty about leaving their dumb dogs home alone." He went on, "A few years ago,

my wife and I were flabbergasted to see a smug-looking guy sauntering through MOMA while his 'comfort dog' happily sniffed the paintings, as if to pee on one. I ran up to a guard and started yelling, 'That guy's dog is about to pee on the Pollock!' She looked at me and said, 'There's nothing we can do about it.'"

Why did the turkey cross the road? To get to the Hampton Jitney. How did the twenty-six-pound fowl get across? With me hoisting him by his "Emotional Support Animal" harness, as if he were a duffel bag.

"You're taking this with you?" an attendant asked, standing in front of the luxury bus on Eighty-sixth Street. Henry was a Royal Palm, a breed not known for its tastiness but one that could easily make the cover of *People's* sexiest-poultry issue. His plumage is primarily white, but many of the feathers are accented with a tip of jet black, giving him a Franz Kline Abstract Expressionist feel.

"Yes," I said, handing the man two tickets, one for me and one for Hope, the turkey's ten-year-old neighbor, in Orange County, New York. Henry flapped his wings furiously, dispersing a good amount of down into the air and emitting noises not unlike the electronic beeps that a car makes when it's too close to the curb. Henry had been driven in from the farm that morning.

"Did you talk to the company?" the attendant asked.

"Yes," I fibbed.

"Good boy, good boy," Hope whispered to the heaving bird, as I strained to lift him up the bus's stairs.

"He's my therapy animal," I primly told the driver. "Do you want to see the letter from my therapist?" The question was not acknowledged.

"Easy, buddy," Hope said, helping me to park Henry on a seat next to the window. Soon the bus was lurching down Lexington Avenue. The turkey angrily flapped his wings. I hovered in the aisle, because, truth be told, I was a bit emotional around my emotional-support animal.

"If you sit with him, maybe he'll calm down, right?" the attendant said. I slid in next to Henry, whose eyes seemed fixed on the Chase bank sign out the window.

"Did you take him for immunizations and everything?" the optimistic attendant asked. Simultaneously, I said yes and Hope said no.

"How much food does he eat?" the attendant continued. "Like, half a pound?" A huddle of passengers had gathered in the aisle, and a lot of phone pictures were snapped. The Jitney stopped at Fifty-ninth Street to let on more passengers.

"Is that a real turkey?" a woman said to her friend as she passed Henry. (No matter what the animal du jour, someone always asked me whether it was real.)

At Fortieth Street, Henry and I, who had pressing appointments in Manhattan, disembarked ("Oh, no. I think I forgot something," I said. "I have to get off"), leaving a trail of plumage behind. The attendant, who asked for a picture of himself with the turkey, was more perplexed by our getting off ("You're going to pay thirty dollars to get off at Fortieth Street!") than by our getting on.

Next stop: Katz's Delicatessen, at the corner of Ludlow and East Houston Streets. "How many?" the guy at the front desk asked, after I'd shown him the therapist's letter and we were joined by two of Henry's human friends.

"Four, plus the turkey," Hope said. We followed a waiter through the crowd until Henry, whom I'd been leading on a leash, plopped onto the floor in a spot that blocked traffic. Hope and I dragged him to a table and hoisted him onto a chair, on which he lay immobile, on his side

with his feet splayed as if he'd conked out on the sofa, watching TV. A wing drooped over one side of the chair.

"What kind of emotional support do you get from him?" a man asked. Henry's E.S.A. badge had come off earlier, when he jumped onto a dumpster on East Houston Street ("He needs to roost," Hope's mom said), but the news of his presence had spread among the diners as if he were Jack Nicholson.

Depending on his mood, a turkey's head and neck can be red, white, blue, or, if very excited, some combination of the three. After lunch, Henry's head had turned purple. His handlers decided that he was "too stressed" and ought to be getting back to the farm.

"Too stressed for yoga?" I said, having hoped to take the turkey to a class at Jivamukti. Did my emotional-support animal need a support animal?

Reflecting on whether it is reasonable to be this inclusive of man's best friends, I called the Australian philosopher and ethicist Peter Singer, who is best known for his book "Animal Liberation," which makes a utilitarian argument for respecting the welfare and minimizing the suffering of all sentient beings. Singer takes a dim view of the emotional-support-animal craze. "Animals can get as depressed as people do," he said, so "there is sometimes an issue about how well people with mental illnesses can look after their animals." He went on, "If it's really so difficult for you to be without your animal, maybe you don't need to go to that restaurant or to the Frick Museum."

An alpaca looks so much like a big stuffed animal that if you walked around F.A.O. Schwarz with one nobody would notice. What if you tried to buy a ticket for one on an Amtrak train? The alpaca in question was four and a half feet tall, weighed a hundred and five pounds, and had a Don King haircut. My mission: to take her on a train trip from Hudson, New York, to Niagara Falls.

"Ma'am, you can't take that," a ticket agent at the Hudson station drawled, in the casual manner in which you might say, "No flip-flops on the tennis court."

"It's a therapy animal. I have a letter."

"O.K.," she said flatly. "That's a first." I paid for our tickets. On the platform, the alpaca, whose name was Sorpresa, started making a series of plaintive braying noises that sounded like a sad party horn. Alpaca aficionados call this type of vocalization humming, and say that it can communicate curiosity, concern, boredom, fear, or contentment but is usually a sign of distress. Sorpresa's wranglers, who raise alpacas for wool, and who had accompanied us, decided that she'd be better off staying closer to home. They had no problem, though, with her

accompanying me to CVS and to some art galleries along Hudson's Warren Street (man in gallery: "Wow! Are they the ones that spit?"). In fact, alpacas rarely spit at humans.

At Olana, a New York State Historic Site, showcasing the nineteenth-century home of the painter Frederic Edwin Church, Sorpresa and I were stopped at the visitors' center by an apologetic tour guide. A higher-up named Paul was summoned, and kindly broke it to me that animals were not permitted.

"It's a museum and a historic home," he said. "There are thousands of distinct objects in there that are over a hundred and twenty years old. I'm sorry, but we just have never been able to take that risk."

While the alpaca stood, perfectly behaved, in the gift shop among hand-painted porcelain tiles, glass vases, and antique lanterns, and I fielded questions from shoppers ("Are you allergic to dogs?"), Paul consulted the site manager in charge of Olana. They called their boss in Albany to ask for guidance.

When you hear that the livestock in your custody has been granted permission to clomp through the premises of a national treasure that houses hundreds of priceless antiques, you do not feel unequivocal joy—particularly when the beast has been known to kick backward if a threat from the rear is perceived. Don't ask me anything about Frederic Church's home. Could you really expect me to concentrate on the art when all I kept thinking was: "Didn't the owners say that when the alpaca's tail is held aloft it means she has to go to the bathroom?" By the time we reached Church's entertainment room, Sorpresa was intently humming a distress signal.

"She needs lunch," I mumbled, and we made a hasty retreat. When I returned the alpaca to her owner and told him about our visit to Olana, he said, "I'm not sure whether it reaffirms my faith in humanity or destroys it."

People with genuine impairments who depend on actual service animals are infuriated by the sort of imposture I perpetrated with my phony E.S.A.s. Nancy Lagasse suffers from multiple sclerosis and owns a service dog that can do everything from turning lights on and off to emptying her clothes dryer. "I'm shocked by the number of people who go online and buy their pets vests meant for working dogs," she told me. "These dogs snarl and go after my dog. They set me up for failure, because people then assume my dog is going to act up."

Carry a baby down the aisle of an airplane and passengers look at you as if you were toting a machine gun. Imagine, then, what it's like travelling with a one-year-old pig who oinks, grunts, and screams, and who, at twenty-six pounds, is six pounds heavier than the average carry-on baggage allowance and would barely fit in the overhead compartment of the aircraft that she and I took from Newark to Boston. Or maybe you can't imagine this.

During check-in, the ticket agent, looking up to ask my final destination, did a double take.

She said, "Oh . . . have you checked with . . . I don't think JetBlue allows . . ."

I rehashed my spiel about the letter and explained that days ago, when I bought the tickets, the service representative said that I could bring Daphne, my pig, as long as she sat on my lap.

"Give me one second," the agent said, picking up the phone. "I'm checking with my supervisor." (Speaking into phone: "Yes, with a pig . . . yeah, yeah . . . in a stroller.") The agent hung up and printed out boarding passes for me and the pig's owner, Sophie Wolf.

"I didn't want to make a mistake," he said. "If there's a problem, Verna, at the gate, will help you. Does she run fast?"

I'm pleased to report that passing through security with a pig in your arms is easier than doing so without one: you get to keep your shoes on and skip the full-body scanner.

"Frank, you never told me you had a brother!" one security officer yelled to another, as Frank helped me retrieve my purse from the security bin. A third officer, crouching to address Daphne, whose head was poking out of her stroller, said, "You're a celebrity. Will you sign autographs later?" The pig grunted.

"How is that even allowed?" I heard a peeved woman behind me say, as I made my way down the jet bridge with my arms clasped around the pig's torso, its head and trotters dangling below. We settled into seats 16A and 16B, since JetBlue does not allow animals in bulkhead or emergency exit aisles. On the floor near our seats, Wolf spread a—I'll just say it—"wee-wee pad," while Daphne arranged herself on my lap, digging her sharp hooves into my thighs. She sniffed and snorted, detecting the arrival of the in-flight chips before they were announced.

"If you're going to drink, we'd rather you do it in the house, where we can party with you."

"If I let her, she'd eat all day—she's a pig," Wolf said, searching her bag for treats. In case of airplane ear, she had also brought a pack of Trident for Daphne, who likes to chew gum. Daphne thrust her snout toward the smell of Gerber Puffs, knocking Wolf's hand, and a quantity of cereal snacks was catapulted into the air. As the pig gobbled up every Puff on the seat, a flight attendant passed Row 16.

"Aren't you adorable!" she said.

"Holy shit! " the woman in back of us said, spying Daphne. "I feel like I'm on drugs. Now I need a drink."

We spent a pleasant day in Boston. One of us grazed on Boston Common, wagging her tail whenever she heard pop music with a strong beat. We took a ride on the Swan Boat and then went to the Four Seasons for afternoon tea, where the letter was trotted out once more. As I pushed the stroller, its privacy panel zipped up, through the dining room, a woman, looking aghast, said, "Oh, my Gawd, your baby is oinking!" At our table, Wolf discreetly fed Daphne some raspberries and a scone, but drew the line at prosciutto sandwiches.

Just when I thought I had successfully taken advantage of the law, I almost tripped up. A taxi-driver balked when he saw the porcine member of our party.

"It's illegal in Massachusetts to have an animal in a taxi, unless it's a service dog," he said.

"But it's an emotional-support animal," I said.

"It doesn't matter," he replied.

"Look, I have a—" I said, fumbling in my purse for the dog-eared piece of paper.

"If a policeman sees me, I'd get in a lot of trouble," he said.

I was about to give up when he said, "I'll take you anyway. But it's not allowed."

In point of fact, as I learned when I later looked it up online, the city of Boston is O.K. with taxi-drivers transporting animals, but they are not required to do so unless the animal is a service dog.

Back at Logan, Daphne regained her superstar status.

A smiling agent, approaching us at the gate, said, "We heard a cute piggy went through security." She added, "If you want to pre-board, the cabin crew would love it."

At the entrance to the plane, we were greeted by three giddy flight attendants: "Oh, my God, don't you just love her?" "I'm so jealous. I want one!"; "I hope you're in my section"; "I'm coming back for pictures."

As we exited at Newark, a member of the flight crew pinned pilot's wings onto Daphne's E.S.A. sweatshirt.

"Are you going to ruin it for all of us?" one of my dog-fancying friends asked, when I told her that I was writing this article. I was surprised to learn how many of my acquaintances were the owners of so-called emotional-support animals. They defend the practice by saying that they don't want to leave their pets home alone, or they don't want to have to hire dog-walkers, or they don't want their pets to have to ride in a plane's cargo hold, or that Europeans gladly accept dogs everywhere. They have tricks to throw skeptics off guard. "People can't ask about my disability," one friend told me. "But if I feel that I'm in a situation where I might have a struggle being let in somewhere with my dog, then I come up with a disorder that sounds like a nightmare. I like to be creative. I'll say I lack a crucial neurotransmitter that prevents me from processing anxiety and that, without the dog, I'm likely to black out and urinate."

Corey Hudson, the C.E.O. of Canine Companions for Independence, a nonprofit provider of trained assistance animals, told me that he has "declared war on fake assistance dogs." Earlier this year, his organization submitted a petition, which has now been signed by twenty-eight thousand people, to the Department of Justice, requesting that it consider setting up a registration—"like the Department of Motor Vehicles"—to test and certify assistance dogs and to regulate the sale of identification vests, badges, and so forth. "They responded that they think the law is adequate."

No animals were harmed during the writing of this article, but one journalist did have to get down on her hands and knees to clean her carpet. ♦

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A REPORTER AT LARGE MAY 24, 2004

THE SQUID HUNTER

Can Steve O'Shea capture the sea's most elusive creature?

BY DAVID GRANN

On a moonless January night in 2003, Olivier de Kersauson, the French yachtsman, was racing across the Atlantic Ocean, trying to break the record for the fastest sailing voyage around the world, when his boat mysteriously came to a halt. There was no land for hundreds of miles, yet the mast rattled and the hull shuddered, as if the vessel had run aground. Kersauson turned the wheel one way, then the other; still, the gunwales shook inexplicably in the darkness. Kersauson ordered his crew, all of whom were now running up and down the deck, to investigate. Some of the crew took out spotlights and shone them on the water, as the massive trimaran—a three-hulled, hundred-and-ten-foot boat that was the largest racing machine of its kind, and was named Geronimo, for the Apache warrior—pitched in the waves.

Meanwhile, the first mate, Didier Ragot, descended from the deck into the cabin, opened a trapdoor in the floor, and peered through a porthole into the ocean, using a flashlight. He glimpsed something by the rudder. "It was bigger than a human leg," Ragot recently told me. "It was a tentacle." He looked again. "It was starting to move," he recalled.

He beckoned Kersauson, who came down and crouched over the opening. "I think it's some sort of animal," Ragot said.

Kersauson took the flashlight, and inspected for himself. "I had never seen anything like it," he told me. "There were two giant tentacles right beneath us, lashing at the rudder."

The creature seemed to be wrapping itself around the boat, which rocked violently. The floorboards creaked, and the rudder started to bend. Then, just as the stern seemed ready to snap, everything went still. "As it unhooked itself from the boat, I could see its tentacles," Ragot recalled. "The whole animal must have been nearly thirty feet long."

The creature had glistening skin and long arms with suckers, which left impressions on the hull. "It was enormous," Kersauson recalled. "I've been sailing for forty years and I've always had an answer for everything—for hurricanes and icebergs. But I didn't have an answer for this. It was terrifying."

What they claimed they saw—a claim that many regarded as a tall tale—was a giant squid, an animal that has long occupied a central place in sea lore; it has been said to be larger than a whale and stronger than an elephant, with a beak that can sever steel cables. In a famous scene in "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," Jules Verne depicts a battle between a submarine and a giant squid that is twenty-five feet long, with eight arms and blue-green eyes—"a terrible monster worthy of all the legends about such creatures." More recently, Peter Benchley, in his thriller "Beast," describes a giant squid that "killed without need, as if Nature, in a fit of perverse malevolence, had programmed it to that end."

Such fictional accounts, coupled with scores of unconfirmed sightings by sailors over the years, have elevated the giant squid into the fabled realm of the fire-breathing dragon and the Loch Ness monster. Though the giant squid is no myth, the species, designated in scientific literature as *Architeuthis*, is so little understood that it sometimes seems like one. A fully grown giant squid is classified as the largest invertebrate on Earth, with tentacles sometimes as long as a city bus and eyes about the size of human heads. Yet no scientist has ever examined a live specimen—or seen one swimming in the sea. Researchers have studied only carcasses, which have occasionally washed ashore or floated to the surface. (One corpse, found in 1887 in the South Pacific, was said to be nearly sixty feet long.) Other evidence of the

The giant squid has consumed the

imaginations of many oceanographers. How could something so big remain unseen for so long—or be less understood than dinosaurs?

ILLUSTRATION BY GERALD SCARFE

giant squid is even more indirect: sucker marks have been spotted on the bodies of sperm whales, as if burned into them; presumably, the two creatures battle each other hundreds of feet beneath the ocean's surface.

The giant squid has consumed the imaginations of many oceanographers. How could something so big and powerful remain unseen for so long—or be less understood than dinosaurs, which died out millions of years ago? The search for a living specimen has inspired a fevered competition. For decades, teams of scientists have prowled the high seas in the hope of glimpsing one. These "squid squads" have in recent years invested millions of dollars and deployed scores of submarines and underwater cameras, in a struggle to be first.

Steve O'Shea, a marine biologist from New Zealand, is one of the hunters—but his approach is radically different. He is not trying to find a mature giant squid; rather, he is scouring the ocean for a baby, called a paralarva, which he can grow in captivity. A paralarva is often the size of a cricket.

"Squid, you see, hatch thousands of babies," O'Shea told me recently, when I called him at his office at the Earth and Oceanic Sciences Research Institute, at the Auckland University of Technology. "Most of these will get eaten up by larger predators, but during periods of spawning the sea should be filled with an absolutely fantastic amount of these miniature organisms. And, unlike the adults, they shouldn't be able to dart away as easily."

Rival hunters once viewed his plan skeptically: if no one could find the animal when it was sixty feet long, how could anyone discover it when it was barely an eighth of an inch? Lately, though, many have come to see O'Shea's strategy as a potential breakthrough. "It offers several advantages," Clyde Roper, an American who is perhaps the world's foremost expert on squid, told me. Roper is a giant-squid hunter himself, who once descended underwater in a steel cage, in search of his quarry. "First, you could find the juvenile at shallower depths. That makes it a lot easier to catch. Furthermore, there are more of them around, because at that stage, even though mortality is high, the adult female will release up to four million eggs. That's a hell of a lot of baby giant squid running around." He added, "It's a matter of a numbers game, pure and simple."

In 1999, O'Shea studied what few had ever seen—the corpse of a baby *Architeuthis*, which was discovered off New Zealand. He described its curious morphology: two eyes spread disconcertingly far apart; a parrot-like mouth concealing a raspy, serrated tongue; eight arms extending outward from a torpedo-shaped head. Each elastic limb was lined with hundreds of suckers, ringed with sharp teeth. The skin was iridescent, and filled with chromatophores—groups of pigment cells—that allowed it to change colors. A funnel near its head could shoot out clouds of black ink. The specimen also had two extraordinary-looking clubbed tentacles. (When a giant squid is mature, they can stretch up to thirty feet.)

Armed with this rare expertise, O'Shea has spent the last five years mapping out where to find a baby giant squid and puzzling over how to catch one and grow it in a tank. This year, he told me, he would venture out during the summer nights of the Southern Hemisphere, when giant squid released their babies. "Come on down, mate," he said. "We'll see if we can't find the bloody thing and make history."

The bodies of dead giant squid have been found in nearly every ocean: in the Pacific, near California; in the Atlantic, off the coasts of Newfoundland and Norway; and in the Indian,

south of South Africa. But no place is considered better for hunting giant squid than the waters around New Zealand. It is here that currents from the tropics and Antarctica converge, and the resulting diversity of marine life creates an abundance of plankton for squid to feed on. And it is here that, in recent years, more dead giant squid have been recovered than anywhere else.

I arrived in Auckland on a morning in late February, and O'Shea greeted me at the airport. He looked much younger than his age, thirty-eight. He wore khaki pants and a khaki-colored shirt, a uniform that evoked a safari ranger. He is small and trim, and has brown hair, which was sticking up as if he had just run his fingers through it. Peering through spectacles that made his eyes seem abnormally large, he confessed with some embarrassment that he had come for me the previous day. "I've been preoccupied with everything that's happening," he said.

He spoke in a soft yet intense murmur, and whenever I addressed him he would turn his head sideways, so that I was talking directly into his right ear. (Later, he told me that he had damaged his left ear in a diving accident.) He reached into his wallet and pulled out his business card; beside his name was a picture of an iridescent squid. While I was looking at it, he grabbed one of my bags and hurried to his truck, which, as soon as he opened the driver's door, exhaled a strange, pungent odor. "I do apologize," he said, as he rolled down the windows. "You'll find that everything around me smells of dead squid and ciggies." In the back seat was a metal pole that was three feet long, with a net on the end. I soon discovered that he carried it with him wherever he went, often slung over his shoulder, as if he were a butterfly hunter.

Over the next few days, we began making preparations for our maiden voyage. At one point, we were speeding down the highway, heading to the store for supplies, when he slammed on the brakes and reversed, in the middle of traffic. "I almost forgot," he said, parking in a lot that overlooked a harbor. He leaped out with the net and darted down a wharf, a lit cigarette dangling from his mouth. He leaned over the edge, the winds buffeting his face, and held the net high over his head. For a moment, he didn't move or breathe. "There," he said, and lunged with the net, slashing at the water. As he pulled the net in, his pant legs wet with spray, I glimpsed a dozen silvery sprat—a minnow-like fish—dancing in the mesh. "I know I look a bit like a bugger," he said. "But these things are rather important."

JULY 29, 1939

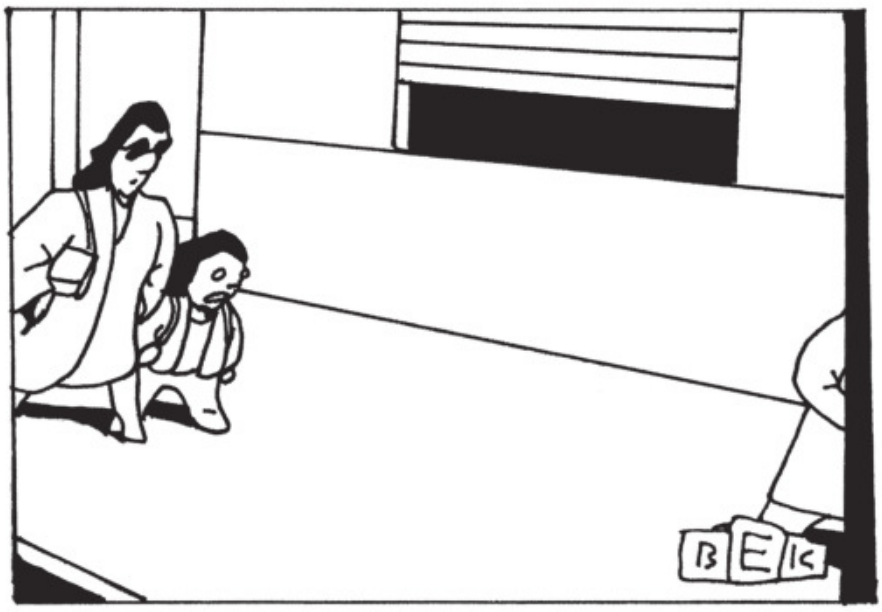
After he flung the net into the water several more times ("Believe it or not, there is a technique to this," he said), he returned to his truck and tossed the sprat into a white bucket in the back seat. We travelled farther down the road, the sprat jostling behind us, and eventually stopped at an aquarium called Kelly Tarlton's Antarctic Encounter and Underwater World. (In its brochures, O'Shea was hailed as the "world-renowned squid man.")

He grabbed the bucket, and we headed inside. "This is where I keep them," he told me. He led me into a damp room with fluorescent lights, in which there was a round glass tank; inside, darting from side to side, were seventy baby squid, each an inch long. O'Shea explained that these squid, which are found in coastal areas, were a smaller species than *Architeuthis*. "Look at them," he said. "They're bloody marvellous, aren't they?"

O'Shea is one of the few people in the world who have succeeded in keeping not only coastal but also deep-sea squid alive in captivity. Unlike an octopus, which, as he put it, "you can't kill, no matter how hard you try," a squid is highly sensitive to its environment. Accustomed to living in a borderless realm, a squid reacts poorly when placed in a tank, and will often plunge, kamikaze-style, into the walls, or cannibalize other squid.

In 2001, during a monthlong expedition at sea, O'Shea caught a cluster of paralarval giant squid in his nets, but by the time he reached the docks all of them had died. He was so distraught that he climbed into the tank, in tears, and retrieved the corpses himself. "I had spent every day, every hour, trying to find the paralarvae, and then they died in my grasp," he told me. For two years, he was so stricken by his failure that he refused to mount another expedition. "I knew if I failed again I would be finished," he recalled. "Not just scientifically but physically and emotionally."

He couldn't stop wondering, though, about what had happened in the tank. His wife, Shoba, a computer scientist who was born in India, told me that sometimes in the middle of an unrelated conversation he would suddenly say, "What did I do wrong?" O'Shea became determined to correct what he called "my fatal mistake," and began a series of painstaking experiments on other species of juvenile deep-sea squid. He would subtly alter the conditions of captivity: tank size, intensity of light, oxygen levels, salinity. He discovered that the tank in which he had stored his paralarvae during the expedition had two lethal flaws: it had a rectangular shape, which, for some reason, caused the squid to sink to the bottom and die; and its walls were made of polyethylene, a plastic compound that, it turns out, is toxic to deep-sea squid. "Knowing what I know now, I feel like a fool," he said. "It was like walking them to their execution."



"We're supposed to shape the narrative of how we spent our summer."

• •

In the mid-nineteen-seventies, Clyde Roper managed to keep ocean-dwelling squid alive for fourteen days—then a record. O'Shea, using cylindrical tanks made of acrylic, had kept his latest coastal specimens alive for eighty days. Earlier, he had maintained a batch of deep-sea squid for more than seventy days, which he then returned to the wild, satisfied that his experiment was a success.

He held up his white bucket. "Watch this," he said, and dumped the sprat into the tank. Though the fish were bigger than the squid, the squid shot toward them, with their arms curved over their heads, hiding their tentacles; they looked metallic, except for their bulging green eyes. Then the squids' arms sprang open, and their tentacles exploded outward, lashing their prey. The fish squirmed to break free, but the squid engulfed them in a web of arms. They drew their frantic prey into their beaks, and the squids' stomachs turned bright red as they filled with the blood of the fish. Staring into the tank, I imagined what a full-grown giant squid might look like swallowing its prey.

When the squid finished eating, O'Shea said, "If I can keep *these* squid alive, there's no reason I can't keep the giant alive. I'll just need a bigger tank."

He was nervous about what would happen to his squid during our expedition—he had left the animals alone for only one day, on Christmas—and he anxiously arranged with an employee at the aquarium to care for them in his absence. "You need to treat them with reverence," he said.

We then headed to his university office, where he had to gather various things for the expedition. It was in an attic-like space, and seemed entirely devoted to what he described as his "lunatic obsession." Pasted to the walls and stacked on tables were pictures, many of which he had sketched himself,

of giant squid, colossal squid, broad squid, warty squid, leopard squid. In addition, there were squid toys, squid key chains, squid journals, squid movies, and squid-related newspaper clippings ("WARNING! GIANT FLYING SQUID ATTACKING VESSELS OFF AUSTRALIA"). On the floor were dozens of glass jars filled with dead squid that had been preserved in alcohol, their eyes and tentacles pressing against the glass.

Many squid scientists wait for decades before getting their hands on the remains of an *Architeuthis*. O'Shea, however, has developed a large network of fishermen informants, and in the last seven years has collected a hundred and seventeen corpses. Together, these specimens offer a clearer picture of the giant squid. O'Shea has concluded that although the animals could be as heavy as a thousand pounds, most weigh between a hundred and four hundred pounds. (Females are typically heavier than males.) His squid collection also provided some of the first clues about the animal's diet. In an article recently published in the *New Zealand Journal of Zoology*, O'Shea documented the "gut contents" of his specimens, which included arrow squid and chunks of another *Architeuthis* ("proof of cannibalism").

In another recent experiment, O'Shea dissected a squid's statolith: a bonelike particle in the animal's ear that helps the animal balance itself. A statolith builds up rings of calcium deposits over time, he explained, and, like the rings on tree trunks, the layers of bone might help scientists determine a squid's age and growth rate.

Initially, O'Shea told me, he had thought that he would dissect his corpses in his office. But, after he made an incision in one, the specimen released a noxious odor, a mixture of rotting flesh and ammonium (which keeps the animal buoyant in the water). Students and faculty fled the building, and he was soon forbidden to make further dissections there. "I became quite unpopular after that," he said.

He began to pick up various jars. "Oh, here it is," he said, holding up what appeared to be a stem of tiny grapes.

"What is it?" I asked.

"The eggs from the ovary of a giant squid. I have a freezer full of 'em."

The phone rang. He stared at it without moving. "They'll only want something," he said.

He stuck a pair of tweezers inside the jar, pulled out a strand of eggs, and placed it under a microscope. "Go ahead, mate, take a look," he said. When I looked into the eyepiece, I could see at least a hundred eggs, each no more than two millimetres wide. O'Shea said that he planned to attach the eggs, which may produce pheromones, to an underwater camera, in the hope of luring a giant squid close enough to be captured on film.

He sat at his computer, typed for a few minutes, then stopped abruptly and ran out of the office. He returned moments later, carrying two hula hoops. "We're almost ready," he said.

The phone rang again. "Oh, bloody hell," he said, and let it ring. He picked up another jar, this one containing two black shells that appeared to lock together. "It's the beak of a giant squid," he said. I ran my finger along its sharp edge, which pricked my skin. He said he had found it inside the stomach of a sperm whale.

He began to race around again, and before long his arms were filled with a box of specimen jars, the hula hoops, a net, a hammer, a rope, a worn leather briefcase that was only half buckled, and several rolled-up maps. "O.K., I think we're about ready," he said. "I just need a smoke, and we'll be off."

For months, he had been carefully working out our destination, studying squid migration patterns as well as satellite readings of water currents and temperatures. His plan was to go south, where he had found the paralarvae before. At the last minute, however, he changed his mind. "We're going north," he said. As we got back in his truck, he added, "I should warn you, there's a bit of a cyclone coming our way."

For as long as sailors have been going out to sea, they have been returning with stories of monsters. The Bible speaks of "a dragon that is in the sea"; the Roman encyclopedia "Naturalis Historia" tells of an enormous "polyp" that was "smeared with brine and had a terrible smell." As the science writer Richard Ellis demonstrates in his 1998 book, "The Search for the Giant Squid," from these disparate accounts emerged a common portrait of a singular beast: a huge sea creature, with fearsome appendages—arms or horns or feet or legs or tails—that jutted out of its head. In the Odyssey, Homer describes a beast called Scylla:

> She has twelve legs, all writhing, dangling down
> and six long swaying necks, a hideous head on each,
> each head barbed with a triple row of fangs . . .
> No mariners yet can boast they'd raced their ship
> past Scylla's lair without some mortal blow.

In Norway, sailors sometimes reported sightings of a tentacled predator, which they dubbed the Kraken. (The word is a colloquial term for a tree with the roots still attached.) In 1755, Bishop Erik Ludvigsen Pontoppidan included the animal in his "Natural History of Norway," claiming that the Kraken was the size of a "floating island," with horns as long as a ship's mast. He went on, "It seems these are the creature's arms, and, it is said, if they were to lay hold of the largest man-of-war, they would pull it down to the bottom."

Meanwhile, American whalers were exchanging their own stories of a "devilfish." In 1851, Herman Melville, who had worked for three years on a whaling ship, published "Moby-Dick," in which he describes a sailor who is witness to "the most wondrous phenomenon": a "vast pulpy mass" with "innumerable long arms radiating from its centre, and curling and twisting like a nest of anacondas."

Around the same time, Johannes Japetus Smith Steenstrup, an eminent Danish zoologist, decided to investigate the rumors himself. As Steenstrup sorted through the available evidence, he was drawn in particular to several accounts of a strange beast caught in the Øresund Strait in the fifteen-forties, and brought to the king of Denmark, at whose court it was preserved in a dried state as "a rarity and a wonder." Named a "sea monk," because its

smooth-looking head evoked men of the cloister, it resembled, in an original sketch, a large squid. In an 1854 lecture, Steenstrup declared that the sea monk, like the Kraken, was "firstly a cephalopod"—a classification term which derives from the Greek words for "head" and "foot," and refers to animals whose tentacles sprout from their head. To the amazement of his audience, Steenstrup then held up a glass jar containing the jaws of a giant squid, which he said had been retrieved from a dead specimen off the coast of Iceland. He named the creature *Architeuthis* ("ruling squid")—marking, as Ellis has noted, "the official passage of the giant squid from the realm of fable into the scientific literature."

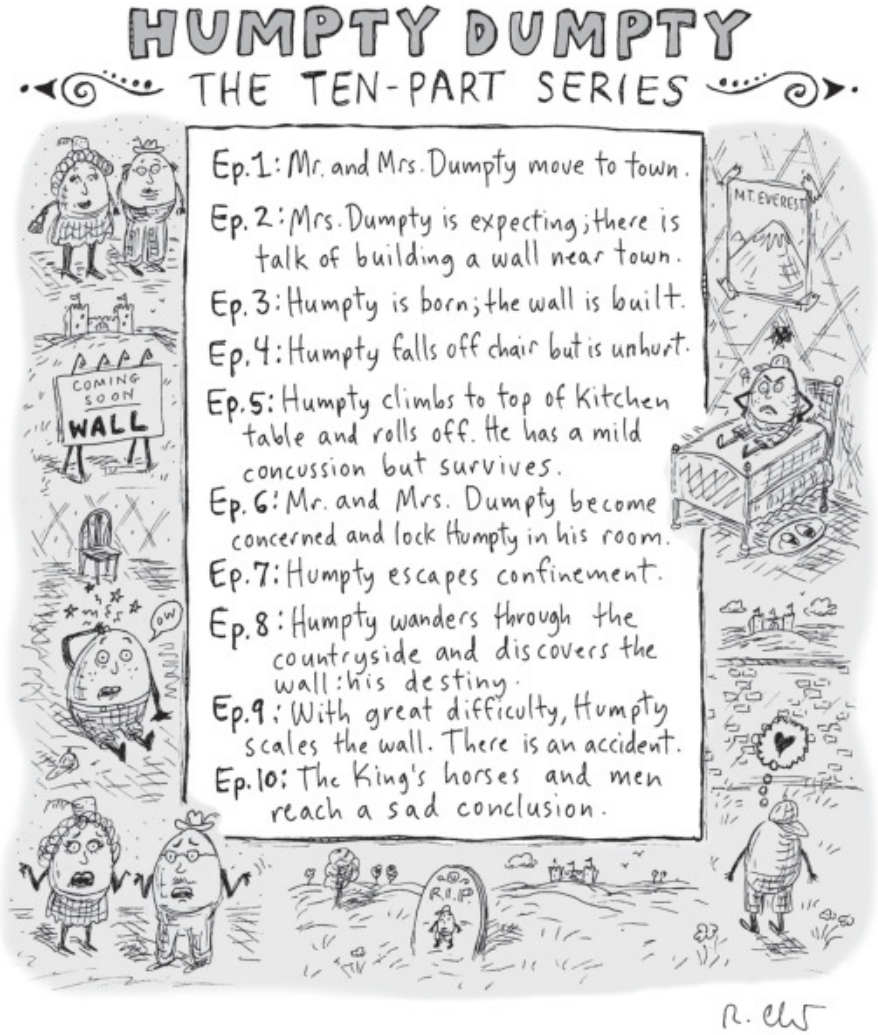
Just as seamen had previously exaggerated the evidence for the giant squid's existence, the scientific community now exaggerated the lack of it. Most scientists were still disputing Steenstrup's findings when, in November, 1861, the crew of the French steamship Alecton, in the middle of the Atlantic, saw a Kraken rise up before them. The captain decided that he had to capture it, and ordered his men to fire their muskets. The bullets seemed to have little effect, so they hurled harpoons, which appeared to glance off it. Finally, they wrapped a noose around its tail, but, as they began to haul the creature on board, its enormous weight caused the rope to slice through its boneless flesh. All that remained was a piece of the tail, which was soon dispatched, along with a detailed report, to the French Academy of Sciences. The report inspired Jules Verne's depiction of a menacing giant squid, but it did little to secure the organism a certified place in the animal kingdom. Arthur Mangin, a French zoologist, declared that the rotting tail was the remains of a sea plant, and urged "the wise, and especially the man of science, not to admit into the catalogue those stories which mention extraordinary creatures . . . the existence of which would be . . . a contradiction of the great laws of harmony and equilibrium which have sovereign rule over living nature."

Scientists continued to doubt Steenstrup's thesis until one day in 1873, when a fisherman off the coast of Newfoundland saw a creature floating on the ocean's surface and struck it with a hook. The animal was alive, and reached up and tried to seize him; the fisherman then grabbed an axe. Over the years, the story was embellished, but one fact was undeniable: the fisherman returned to shore with a tentacle from a giant squid, which was nineteen feet long. It was placed in a museum, in St. John's, Newfoundland, where the public could see it. At last, even the most ardent skeptic was forced to admit that the Kraken was real.

As the winds and rains from the cyclone began to descend on New Zealand, O'Shea stood in his back yard beside his boat, which rested on a trailer. The boat was not exactly what I had imagined it to be. It was barely twenty feet long and seven feet wide, with an outboard motor. There was no galley or head, and no place to sleep, except for a forward berth the size of a broom closet. "I suppose you were expecting one of those American yachts, weren't you?" O'Shea said with a smile.

Initially, he had planned to charter a vessel with a traditional squid squad—a professional crew and a team of scientists. Squid hunters from Japan, America, and Europe crisscrossed the sea in this manner, and O'Shea had been on such a voyage when he found his paralarvae. But such expeditions cost millions of dollars, and O'Shea is an academic who must cobble together funding for his research from private sources, like the Discovery Channel. He had already sunk a significant portion of his family's modest savings into his quest, and as a result he was unable to afford a hearing aid, among other necessities. "If I don't find a giant squid soon, I'll be ruined," he told me.

Yet, according to other hunters, part of the genius of O'Shea's scheme is that it can be executed relatively cheaply. Juvenile squid swim in shallower waters than adults, and he didn't need to


HUMPTY DUMPTY
THE TEN-PART SERIES
Ep. 1: Mr. and Mrs. Dumpty move to town.
Ep. 2: Mrs. Dumpty is expecting; there is talk of building a wall near town.
Ep. 3: Humpty is born; the wall is built.
Ep. 4: Humpty falls off chair but is unhurt.
Ep. 5: Humpty climbs to top of kitchen table and rolls off. He has a mild concussion but survives.
Ep. 6: Mr. and Mrs. Dumpty become concerned and lock Humpty in his room.
Ep. 7: Humpty escapes confinement.
Ep. 8: Humpty wanders through the countryside and discovers the wall: his destiny.
Ep. 9: With great difficulty, Humpty scales the wall. There is an accident.
Ep. 10: The King's horses and men reach a sad conclusion.
COMING SOON
WALL
OW!
MT. EVEREST
R.I.P.

descend, say, in a submarine. He also didn't require a ship that could accommodate a huge tank. By December, O'Shea had decided that he would go forward using his own fishing boat, and he whittled down his crew to three people: O'Shea, myself, and a graduate student in marine biology named Peter Conway, a gentle thirty-two-year-old vegetarian who rolled his own cigarettes and had never been on such an expedition. "The big swells make me a wee queasy," he confessed at one point.

O'Shea told me that he was not willing to wait for the cyclone to pass: there was only a short period each year during which adult squid migrated into the region to spawn and release their eggs. And so we set off in the truck, with the trailer in tow, and headed north, listening to Neil Diamond's slightly nasal tenor on the stereo. ("He's bloody brilliant, isn't he?" O'Shea said.)

Within a few hours, the exquisite landscape of New Zealand, with its long white shores and volcanic hills and sheep farms, was obscured in blackness, as the storm intensified. The trailer rocked in the wind, which was approaching gale force. According to news reports, a nearby river had burst its banks, forcing local residents to evacuate. Civil-defense teams were being called up, and the power had gone out in several cities, including Auckland.

The police were warning motorists to stay off the roads, but we continued farther up the northern peninsula, past towns with Maori names like Te Kao and Te Hapua, until we arrived at a wooden cabin, in the afternoon. We would stay here during the day, O'Shea explained, then launch the boat at night, when the squid rose upward in the water column to feed.

The cabin had no phone and no heat, and it was musty inside, as if it had been abandoned for years. "Not bloody much, is it?" O'Shea said, as he brushed some ants off the kitchen table. He didn't seem too dismayed, though, and while Conway and I unpacked our bags he spread his equipment across the floor and began to assemble a peculiar form. First, he took a round plywood board that was the size of a stop sign and drilled holes around its perimeter. He wove cable ties through the holes, then attached the board to a tube of fine-meshed netting that was large enough to accommodate him inside it. He was still working when Conway and I went to bed; when I got up the next morning, I found him in the same position. "It's coming along nicely," he said. A candle was burning beside him, and he held a sharp knife over the flame. Using the hot blade, he cut several holes into the sides of the net.

The slow, methodical work had put him in a reflective mood, and he told me how he first became interested in the giant squid. "It had never been my plan," he said. "When I was four or five, my parents got divorced, and I was sent to live with my grandmother. I didn't have many friends. I was one of these horribly geeky kids. I had glasses and a heart murmur and arthritis, and I spent all my time on the beach, looking for shells. I collected thousands of them. When I was thirteen or fourteen, I started to go out on commercial fishing boats in the summer to try to find the rarest kinds. I remember once, I was on this boat, and the fishermen pulled in this shell. I knew there were only one or two in all of New Zealand, and I let out this loud scream, and the captain came down and yelled at me for screaming, but I didn't mind. I was so excited to find it."

He burned another hole in the net, filling the room with an acrid smell. He said, "After I graduated from the university with a doctorate in marine biology, I went to work for the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research. In 1996, I got a phone call saying that a fisherman had found a giant squid down in Wellington, and did I want it. I'd never seen one, so I raced down to the jetty, and took one look at it, and it was the biggest bloody thing I'd ever seen. I knew it wouldn't fit in the car, and so I borrowed a trailer, and strapped it down with the tentacles draped over the car.

"Before long, the press got wind of it, and they started calling and asking me all these questions, and I didn't know anything about the giant squid. I spouted a bunch of nonsense, and I soon realized no one really knew *anything* about this blasted thing. It was this great unknown, this complete mystery. And I've been trying to solve it ever since."

He seemed slightly embarrassed by

SEPTEMBER 25, 2000

CROWS

In Japan, in Seattle, In Indonesia—there they were—
each one loud and hungry,
crossing a field, or sitting
above the traffic, or dropping

to the lawn of some temple to sun itself
or walk about on strong legs,
like a landlord. I think
they don't envy anyone or anything—

not the tiger, not the emperor,
not even the philosopher.
Why should they?
The wind is their friend, the least tree is home.

Nor is melody, they have discovered, necessary.
Nor have they delicate palates;
without hesitation they will eat
anything you can think of—

corn, mice, old hamburgers—
swallowing with such hollering and gusto

no one can tell whether it's a brag
or a prayer of deepest thanks. At sunrise, when I walk out,

I see them in trees, or on ledges of buildings,
as cheerful as saints, or thieves of the small job
who have been, one more night, successful—
and like all successes, it turns my thoughts to myself.

Should I have led a more simple life?
Have my ambitions been worthy?
Has the wind, for years, been talking to me as well?
Somewhere, among all my thoughts, there is a narrow path.

It's attractive, but who could follow it?
Slowly the full morning
draws over us its mysterious and lovely equation.
Then, in the branches poling from their dark center,

ever more flexible and bright,
sparks from the sun are bursting and melting on the birds' wings,
as, indifferent and comfortable,
they lounge, they squabble in the vast, rose-colored light.

—Mary Oliver

his candor. "What we need now are Coke bottles," he said. He had brought several empty one-litre containers with him; he sliced each bottle in half, so that the top part resembled a funnel. He inserted each funnel, the wide part facing out, into the holes that he had made in the mesh netting. He then sealed them in place with a glue gun. "We're ready for the final touches," he said. He slid a hula hoop inside the bottom end of the mesh sheath; the result looked like a Victorian skirt. Finally, he clamped the bottom of the net to a small glass container.

He climbed onto a chair and held the contraption up: it was roughly six feet long and cylindrical in shape, with a round hardwood top, a funnel-studded net draped along the sides, and a little glass jar dangling on the bottom. "Whaddaya think, chappies?" O'Shea asked Conway and me.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A giant-squid trap."

O'Shea pointed to the funnels excitedly, and explained that the paralarvae would swim through them and get trapped inside the net, eventually ending up in the glass jar. This rough-looking device had been carefully conceived: the net was made of extra-fine mesh, which would do less damage to the animals; the board was marine plywood, which would keep the net vertical in the water; and the Coke bottles were exactly the right size to trap the paralarvae. "It's ugly as sin, I admit, but it should do the job," he said, adding, "I'm a poor scientist, so it's a bit of Steve O'Shea invention."

He spent the rest of the day building a second trap, then announced that it was time to go hunting. The worst of the storm had blown out to sea, but the weather remained volatile, with gusting winds and dangerously high waves. Two surfers had drowned. "We'll have to do some reconnaissance," O'Shea said. Before sundown, we took a drive with the trailer, trying to find a safe place to launch the boat. We pulled into an inlet surrounded by volcanic cliffs. "This will have to do," O'Shea said.

He backed the trailer down the beach, and we put the boat in the water. I climbed on board, and O'Shea and Conway followed. It was cold, but O'Shea was barefoot, and he was wearing only cutoff jeans and a baggy T-shirt. "Righteo, then," he said, and gunned the engine.

O'Shea had no radar, but he had a navigational system with a small flickering display that signalled the location of the shore and the depth of the sea. It would be our only guide in the darkness.

"It'll probably be too rough out there for any fishing boats," O'Shea shouted over the noise of the engine. "But we're going to need to be careful of container ships. They can come up pretty fast." It was now twilight, and he squinted at one of the buoys that marked a safe route through the channel.

"What color is that?" he asked me.

"It's green," I said. "Can't you see it?"

"I'm not just deaf," he said. "I'm color-blind."

As we left the harbor, it began to rain, and the smooth channel gave way to swells. The boat leaped over the crests, its aluminum hull vibrating.

"A bit rough, ain't it?" Conway said.

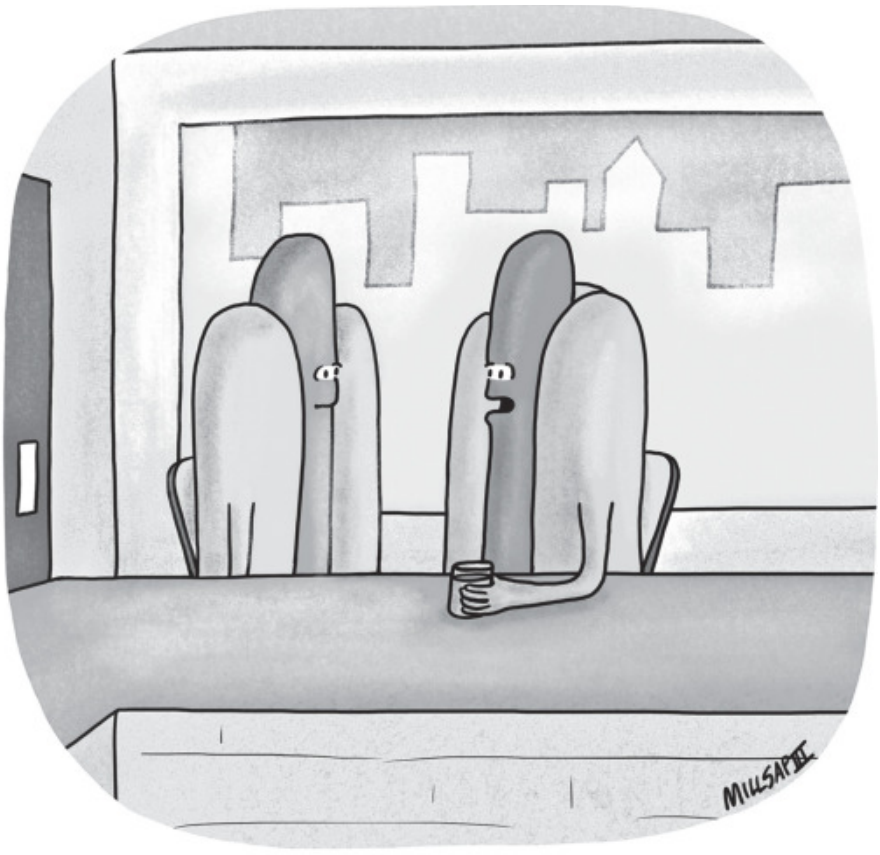
"She's sturdier than she looks," O'Shea said of the vessel. He glanced at the forward berth. "Underneath those cushions are the life jackets. You don't need to wear them, but just so you know where they are."

The sun disappeared over the horizon, and for a while the sky released a flurry of bright colors, as if it had its own chromatophores. Then it grew dark, and the waves announced themselves not by sight but by sound, as they clapped against the bow. I slipped on my life jacket.

O'Shea said he knew just the spot for hunting, and he stared at the glowing dots on the navigational system. "Where are we going?" I asked.

"There," he said, pointing into the distance.

I peered over the windshield and saw something shadowy looming over the waves, as if it were the prow of a ship. As we got closer, I realized that it was a large, jagged rock. More rocks became visible, hundreds of them, all jutting skyward. A channel, forty feet wide, flowed between the rocks, and the water stormed through this opening as if it were racing down a chute. O'Shea sped straight ahead. As we approached the rocks, the boat began to tremble while the swells climbed from ten to seventeen feet; the bow plunged



"It seems like all we ever talk about is meat and meat by-products."

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downward, the boat sliding wildly in the water. "Hold on, mate," O'Shea said. "Here comes a big one."

The boat soared upward, and I felt momentarily suspended in the air, as if I were a cartoon character who had just stepped off a cliff. Then the boat fell straight down, and another wave crashed into the boat, sending us hurtling backward. My notebook and pen slid to the deck. The peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches we had packed for supper tumbled out of their containers. "We just need to make sure they don't take us broadside," O'Shea said.

The currents were pulling us toward the rocks, and I could hear the massive waves crashing into them. I was holding a flashlight, and I shone it in front of us: there was a twenty-foot wall of water. I turned around, and discovered that another enormous wall was pressing down on us from behind.

"You won't find this in New York, will you, mate?" O'Shea said.

For a moment, I wondered if O'Shea was fully in command of his faculties. But we made it through the gap in the rocks, and he skillfully steered the boat into a protected inlet. It was indeed the perfect spot.

We dropped our anchor. O'Shea grabbed his homemade nets, and placed several glow sticks inside them. "The squid are drawn to the light," he said. He tied the nets to a lead weight, which he then dropped in the water. We watched the light grow dimmer as the traps sank. "Well, let's see what's down there," O'Shea said.

Though oceans cover three-quarters of the Earth—the Pacific alone is bigger than all the continents put together—the underwater realm has remained largely invisible to human beings. For centuries, there was no way for scientists to peer into the depths, no telescope that could gaze into the abyss. (A pearl diver can venture down no more than a hundred feet.) Until the nineteenth century, most scientists assumed that the deepest parts of the ocean—where the temperature was frigid, the pressure intense, and the light minimal—contained no life.

In 1872, the British government and the Royal Society launched the first major oceanic expedition, transforming a two-hundred-and-twenty-six-foot naval warship into a floating laboratory, equipped with microscopes and vats of pickling alcohol. Christened the H.M.S. Challenger, the ship, with five scientists, roamed the globe for three and a half years. The crew was constantly dredging the ocean floor for specimens, and the work was repetitive, and brutal; two men went insane, two others drowned, and another committed suicide. The scientists, however, were enthralled with their discoveries. They catalogued more than forty-seven hundred new species—proving, as C. Wyville Thomson, the chief scientist, later noted, that living beings "exist over the whole floor of the ocean."

The voyage gave rise to the field of oceanography, but it also exposed the twin obstacles that would impede underwater exploration for generations: prohibitive costs and primitive technology. Even when scientists could finance expeditions, their equipment allowed them to study animals only after hauling them on deck—the equivalent of looking at a human corpse, then trying to imagine it alive.

In the nineteen-thirties, two wealthy Americans, Charles William Beebe and Otis Barton, used twelve thousand dollars of their own money to design a hollow steel ball with two quartz peepholes, which they called a "bathysphere," named after the Greek word for "deep." The vessel, which was four and a half feet in diameter, was tethered to a ship with a cable; if it snapped, the men inside would die at the bottom of the sea.

In 1934, near Bermuda, Beebe and Barton went down five hundred feet, then a thousand feet more, as greater and greater pressure pushed against the steel walls; they stopped at three thousand and twenty-eight feet. It was far deeper than anyone had ever gone. At one point, Beebe peered out, and spotted something that was at least twenty feet long. Later, in his autobiography, "Half Mile Down," he wrote, "What-

ever it was, it appeared and vanished so unexpectedly and showed so dimly that it was quite unidentifiable except as a large, living creature."

In 1960, the United States Navy dispatched its own team of scientists to the bottom of the Mariana Trench, the deepest spot in the ocean floor, in the Western Pacific. (It is seven times as deep as the Grand Canyon.) The voyage was considered among oceanographers to be the equivalent of landing on the moon, but America was caught up in the Cold War, and, because such exploration had little military relevance, similar projects were soon abandoned.

According to one recent study, as much as ninety-five per cent of the oceans remains unexplored. It is believed that the seas contain as many as ten million species, of which fewer than half have been identified. By the nineteen-sixties, the giant squid had become, for oceanographers, an emblem of all that was still unknown about the seas.

In the mid-nineteen-sixties, Frederick Aldrich, a marine biologist from Canada, formed the first official squid squad. He distributed posters around Newfoundland that bore an illustration of a giant squid and the words "WANTED! DEAD OR ALIVE." On one hunting trip, he spent four days in a submersible that he had baited with raw tuna, but, like so many of his expeditions, this one was fruitless.

In the nineteen-nineties, as more squid hunters took up the chase, Clyde Roper decided to let the one animal that was known to prey on *Architeuthis* find it for him. For several years, in oceans ranging from the North Atlantic to the South Pacific, he and his squad paddled out to sea in inflatable kayaks and delicately attached "crittercams"—specially designed underwater cameras—to the bodies of sperm whales. To Roper's disappointment, the crittercams didn't spy a single giant squid. In 1999, Roper, who is sixty-six, underwent a quadruple-bypass operation; though he has promised his family to desist from all the fund-raising that such expeditions require, he recently told me, "I'm hoping to make one more voyage."

Meanwhile, the competition between rival squid squads has intensified. Xander Paumgarten, a publicist who helped to promote a 2000 expedition by Jacques Cousteau's son Jean-Michel, told me, "There's this all-out battle between these guys. Some of them totally hate each other." Roper told me that many of the hunters now work in secret. O'Shea shares his research with several colleagues, whom he calls "gentlemen," but there are some experts he calls "cannibals," with whom he refuses to speak. "A lot of these people are vicious," he said. "They want you to fail so they can be first."

Last January, before I ventured out with O'Shea, I joined the squid squad of Bruce Robison, one of O'Shea's leading counterparts. Unlike other hunters, Robison has two underwater robots, which have superior imaging capabilities and speed through the water more quickly than divers or most submersibles. The robots belong to Robison's employer, the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, which was founded, in 1987, by David Packard, the billionaire technology guru. Situated a hundred miles south of San Francisco, the institute has an annual budget of thirty million dollars. On the expedition I was joining, Robison and his squad planned to sink a robot worth ten million dollars in Monterey Canyon, the deepest underwater chasm along the continental United States.

Robison and his squad are "opportunists," as he put it, meaning that they film more than just squid. ("If you only look for one animal," he said, "you'll always be disappointed.") Nonetheless, the squad had planned to spend six days in the same general area where, in 1980, Robison came closer than perhaps anyone to capturing an adult *Architeuthis*. That day, he had been trawling with a net nearly two thousand feet down; he decided to bring the net to the surface, and snapped its steel jaws shut. The bars clamped down on the tentacle of a live giant squid. Before the net reached the boat, the tentacle had torn off—leaving only twelve feet of it. "There was this big thing hanging off the front of the net," Robison recalled. "The suckers were still grasping." Robison's discovery offered the most accurate recording yet of a giant squid's depth in the water column. "Until then, most people thought they were only near the bottom," he said. Robison later dissected the tentacle and performed chemical analyses; the consistency of the tissue, and its high level of protein, led him to speculate that the giant squid was "a relatively strong swimmer." Robison told me that he had taken a bite of its raw, rubbery flesh. "How could I not?" he said, adding, "It was bitter."

When I arrived at the institute, Robison and his squad were already on board the ship. The vessel was named the Western Flyer, for a fishing vessel that John Steinbeck had sailed on during a 1940 expedition, a journey he later chronicled in "The Log from the Sea of Cortez." The Western Flyer was one of the most incredible ships I had ever seen. It was a hundred and seventeen feet long, with three layers of decks, and it had an unusual rectangular shape. Its boxlike frame rested on two pontoons, each running the length of the boat, allowing the Western Flyer to remain almost still in the roughest seas.

There were twenty-one people in Robison's squad, among them computer scientists, marine biologists, chemists, and engineers. To my surprise, there seemed to be no one on deck when I stepped on board. As I opened the main door, though, I was greeted by a clatter of men and machines. In the center of the cavernous room, surrounded by crewmen communicating through headsets, was the remotely operated vehicle, or R.O.V. It was hanging from a cable attached to a crane; it was the size of a Volkswagen and weighed some eight thousand pounds. At first glance, it appeared to be nothing more than a jumble of wires. The front of the machine, or at least what I presumed was the front, had two large spotlights, which could be rotated. On the top of the machine was an outer shell with a single word painted on it: "TIBURON," Spanish for "shark."

"Welcome aboard," Robison said.

Robison was standing near the R.O.V., coördinating much of the activity. He resembled an eighteenth-century whaling captain, with white hair and a white beard; even his eyebrows were inordinately thick and wild. He began to explain how the robot operated: a coated fibre-optic wire connected

the ship to the R.O.V., sending signals back and forth. The machine was propelled by electric thrusters and had flotation devices that allowed it to hover with neutral buoyancy, much like a giant squid, despite weighing four tons. What's more, the R.O.V. was outfitted with eight cameras, providing, as Robison put it, "a complete portrait of a three-dimensional universe." He added, "Our mandate is to go and see what no one else can."

He led me around the rest of the ship, which had a dining room, a computer room, a laboratory, and a freezer for preserving specimens. On the upper deck, along with the bridge, were quarters equipped with televisions, which displayed the Tiburon's live feed. "The dirty secret is that you never have to get out of bed," he said. He left me to settle in my own private room. I soon realized that the boat had already set sail: it cut so smoothly through the water that I hadn't noticed it moving.

That afternoon, we drifted over the Monterey Canyon, and stopped to make our first probe. A team of half a dozen engineers and technicians prepared the Tiburon.

"How do we look on the starboard camera?" one asked.

"Good to go."

"Do you have thrust?"

"Roger that."

The crew stepped back and the lights on the Tiburon began to blink. A trapdoor slowly opened, revealing the ocean beneath, and the Tiburon hovered above it like a spaceship. The crane then lowered the R.O.V. into the turbulent water, its snubbed head pitching forward, its fibre-optic cable trailing behind it, like an endless tail.

I walked toward the stern and into the control room, where I expected to find Robison. It was dark, except for nearly two dozen glowing monitors, which broadcast color images from the Tiburon's myriad cameras, each one capturing a different angle. Robison sat beside the pilot, who steered the R.O.V. with a joystick.

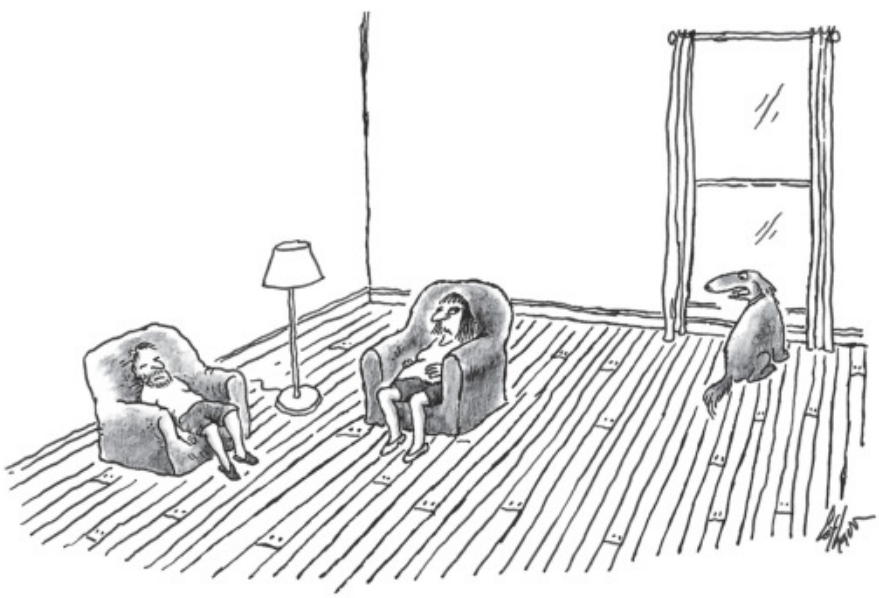
Strange gelatinous creatures began to appear, which gave off dazzling displays of bioluminescence. There was a crustacean that walked through the water like a daddy-longlegs spider, and fish with jaws that were unhinged. There was a *Tiburonia granrojo*, a red balloon-like jellyfish that Robison and his squad had discovered and named for the R.O.V., and that was one of hundreds of new species that the squad had uncovered. There was a diaphanous animal, which they still hadn't identified, and called simply "the mystery mollusk." And there was, when the Tiburon reached the soft, craggy bottom of the ocean, a constant snowfall of decomposing skeletons and microscopic organisms.

Over the next several days, as the Tiburon descended as deep as two miles, we saw hundreds of squid: blue-eyed ones, translucent ones, polka-dotted ones. Observing these squid in their natural habitat, Robison said, provided clues to the behavior of their giant relative. When the camera zoomed in on an individual squid, we could see water entering the muscular sac, or mantle, that contains the squid's internal organs; it then inflated and contracted, shooting the water out through a funnel and propelling the squid like a bullet through the ocean. Watching the animals outrace the robot, I had a sense of why Clyde Roper once said of squid, "The only ones you catch are the slow, the sick, and the stupid."

Another reason for their elusiveness is their unusually large eyes, which enable them to discern predators in places where light is nearly absent. (The giant squid's eyes are thought to be the largest of any animal.) Squid also have highly developed brains for an invertebrate, and have nerve fibres that are hundreds of times thicker than those in human beings—allowing them to react in an instant. (For many decades, neuroscientists have relied on squid neurons for their research.) "By observing squid in their natural habitat, we have discovered that they are much more intelligent, much more complex than anything we suspected," Robison said.

As we watched, the squid seemed to be using light patterns, colors, and postures as a means of communication. They didn't just turn red or pink or yellow; ripples of color would wash across their bodies. And they would contort their arms into elaborate arrangements—sometimes balling them together, or holding them above their heads, like flamenco dancers. Robison explained that they use these movements and color changes to warn other squid of predators, to perform mating rituals, to attract prey, and to conceal themselves.

Several times, when the Tiburon got too close to them, the squid ejected streams of black ink. In the past, scientists assumed that it served solely as camouflage or a decoy. Robison told me that he and other scientists now believe the ink contains chemicals that disable predators; this would explain why he has seen deep-sea squid re-



"Was I rescued only to die of boredom?"

lease black nimbuses in depths where there is no light. "As much as we know about squid, we still don't know that much," he said.

Robison noted that the behavior of giant squid, in particular, was poorly understood. No one knows just how aggressive giant squid are, whether they hunt alone or in packs, or whether, as legend has it, they will attack people as well as fish. After Robison caught the tentacle and descended in a submersible to the same spot, he said, "It occurred to me that there was a pissed-off squid out there with a grudge against me." (Other scientists suspect that the giant squid's violent reputation is undeserved; O'Shea, for one, contends that *Architeuthis* is probably a "gentle beast.")

The expedition ended without a glimpse of *Architeuthis*, but, at one point, several jumbo squid did appear on the ship's screens. They were only a fraction of the size of a giant squid—between five and eight feet in length and a hundred or so pounds—but they looked frighteningly strong. One night, several of the ship's scientists dropped a jig, a device specially designed to lure squid, over the side of the boat. They caught two jumbo squid. As they reeled each squid in, screaming, "Pump him up!," the weight and strength of the animals nearly pulled the men overboard. Several minutes later, Robison and I went to the ship's laboratory, where a scientist held up one of the jumbo squid. The creature was nearly as long as Robison is tall, and its tentacles were still lashing and writhing. "Now imagine a giant squid with a tentacle thirty feet long," he said.

After the squid was dissected, part of it was given to the cook. The next day, it appeared on a silver platter. "From beast to feast," the chef said, as we sat down for supper.

"Shall we take a peek?" O'Shea said, leaning over the stern of the boat. It was after midnight, several hours since we had dropped the traps in the water; the rain had stopped, but a cold wind swirled around us. As the boat rocked in the waves, O'Shea pulled in the line, hand over hand, because the boat didn't have winches. The traps weighed at least fifty pounds, and he climbed up on the side of the boat to get a better grip, his bare feet spread apart. As the first net emerged from the water, O'Shea shouted for Conway and me to haul it in, and we laid it on the deck, as icy water spilled around our feet. "Hurry, chappies," O'Shea said. "Get the torch."

Conway shined the flashlight into the net. There were no squid, but there were swarms of krill, and O'Shea seemed buoyed by the discovery. "We're definitely in squid eating country," he said.

He dropped the nets overboard again, anchoring them in place, and began the next phase of the hunt—towing a third, larger net behind the boat. "We'll trawl for fifteen minutes at about one and a half knots," O'Shea said. The maneuver was a delicate one, he explained: if he trawled too deep or not deep enough, the paralarvae would escape the net; if he trawled for too long, the net would suffocate what he caught. We drove the boat around for precisely fifteen minutes, then pulled in the net and dumped its contents—a thick, granular goop—into a cylindrical tank filled with seawater. The tank instantly lit up from all the bioluminescence. "There's plenty of life in there, that's for sure," O'Shea said.

He found no *Architeuthis* in the tank, but he was undaunted. "If it were easy, everyone would be doing it," he said.

By all accounts, O'Shea is tireless and single-minded: he works eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, and he no longer watches TV or reads newspapers. He never attends parties. "I'm not anti-social," he said. "I just don't socialize." His sister told me, "We'd love him even if he chased mushrooms, but we just wish he'd spend the same emotion on people as he did on squid." Shoba, his wife, who often calls him to remind him to eat lunch, said, "I don't want him to stop. I just wish he could temper it a little bit and see that there are other things out there."

People inevitably compare O'Shea's quest to that of Captain Ahab. But, unlike Melville's character, O'Shea does not think of the creature he pursues in grand symbolic terms. Indeed, he is constantly trying to strip the giant squid of its lore. He considers books like "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" to be "rubbish"; his studies of dead specimens have led him to believe that the longest recorded measurement of a

"Every day is someone's birthday when you work at a multibillion-dollar global conglomerate."

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giant squid—fifty-seven feet—is apocryphal. "Now, if someone really wanted to prostitute the truth all they have to do is take the tentacle and walk and walk and walk," he once told me. "The bloody things are like rubber bands, and you can make a forty-foot squid suddenly look sixty feet." Unlike some other hunters, he thinks it is ridiculous to imagine that a giant squid could kill a sperm whale. He thinks of the giant squid as both majestic and mundane—with a precise weight, diet, length, and life span. He wants it, in short, to be real. "We have to move beyond this mythical monster and see it as it is," O'Shea said. "Isn't that enough?"

After a while, he stood and dropped the trawling net back in the water. We worked until after sunrise. When we still hadn't found any squid, O'Shea said, "An expedition that begins badly usually ends well."

At the cabin, Conway and I took a brief nap while O'Shea plotted our next course. In the afternoon, we ventured into town for supplies. O'Shea warned us not to use his real name; he had recently campaigned to shut down a nearby fishery in order to protect the wildlife, and he said that he had received several death threats. "This is quite dangerous country for me," he said.

I wasn't sure how seriously to take his warning, but, when I accidentally used his name, he became tense. "Careful, mate," he said. "Careful."

Later that day, O'Shea was standing on the cabin porch, smoking a cigarette, when a villager approached. "Are you the guy chasing them monsters?" he asked.

O'Shea looked at him hesitantly. "I'm afraid that would be me," he said.

"I saw you on the telly, talking about them things," the man said. He reached out his hand. "After I saw you, I named my cat Architeuthis."

O'Shea brightened. "This mate here has a cat named Archie," he told Conway and me.

O'Shea invited the man in for "a cuppa," and soon he and the stranger were bent down over his maps. "They say you can find the big calamari out here," the man said, pointing to a reef.

Before long, another villager stopped by and was offering his own advice. "I'd try over here," he said. "Billy Tomlin said he once found a big dead one out in these parts." O'Shea took in the information. Fishermen sometimes embroider the truth, he said, but they also know the local waters better than anyone else.

That night, we went out again. Although we continued to haul up enormous quantities of shrimp and krill—sometimes there were so many that they could barely move inside the tank—we found not a single squid. As the night lengthened, O'Shea seemed, for the first time, to grow dispirited. "The weather's causing havoc with the currents," he said.

After each haul, he'd study his charts and choose a new spot with renewed hope—"This could be it," he'd say—only to be disappointed again. When the sun rose, at six-thirty, casting its bright rays upon the sea, O'Shea raced the boat over to the two anchored traps. He said that he had often had the best luck at dawn; the creatures seemed to rear their heads before vanishing deep below. "Let's see what we got," he said, hauling the nets on board.

"Anything?" Conway asked.

O'Shea held one of the nets up to his eye, then dropped it in disgust. "Diddly," he said.

"We have to go farther out," O'Shea said the following night. We sped far into the Pacific, leaving the safety of the inlet behind. The hauls remained dismal; after each one, he aimed the boat farther out to sea, saying, "We have to go deeper, that's all."

Conway, who was looking increasingly pale, said, "Haven't we gone out enough?"

"I know the squid are out there," O'Shea said.

The less he found, the harder he seemed to work. He is not a big man, and his childhood illness had left his body somewhat brittle, yet he never slowed down as he pulled the net in with all its weight, then returned it to the water. His fingers were covered in blisters, his clothes were soaked through, and his glasses were stained with salt from the seawater.

"He's a bit of a fanatic, isn't he?" Conway said quietly.

As the cold nights wore on, we worked in a kind of fog. We were getting little sleep during the day, and it became harder to pay attention to the mounds of larval fish, shrimp, krill, and jellyfish; not even the sight of dolphins jumping in the waters nearby relieved the drudgery. At one point, I felt fatigued, and lay down in the forward berth. I could fit only if I bent my knees toward my chest. As I closed my eyes and listened to the waves smashing against the hull, I could hear O'Shea grunting as he pulled in another net and cursing when there was nothing inside.

On yet another night, at around four in the morning, as we pulled in the trawling gear and dropped the contents in the cylindrical tank, Conway shone a flashlight and asked, "What's that?"

O'Shea peered inside, and blinked several times, trying to keep himself awake. "Heaven help us!" he shouted. "It's a fucking squid!" He stared blearily into its eyeball. "It looks like Archie," he told us.

Although the creature was only the size of my thumbnail, I could see it, too—its tentacles, its fins, its eyes, its arms, its bullet-shaped mantle.

"This could be your dream squid," Conway said.

"Quick," O'Shea said. "Let's drain some of the krill before they crush it."

He held the cylindrical tank in the air, his arms shaking from exhaustion, as the waves pounded the side of the boat. "Steady!" he yelled. It was hard to see in the darkness—there was no moonlight—and as he poured some of the contents into a strainer, struggling to balance against the violent waves, something happened.

"Where did it go?" O'Shea asked.

"I don't know," Conway said. "I can't see it anymore."

"Jesus Christ," O'Shea said.

He grabbed a specially designed tank, which he had purchased expressly for transporting a baby giant squid, and poured the rest of the cylindrical tank's contents inside it. "Where is the bloody thing?" he said. "Where is it?"

He reached in with his hand, stirring the water frantically. "It has to be here," he said.

He pulled out one shrimp, then another, holding them under the light.

"It's gone," Conway said.

But O'Shea didn't seem to hear. He sifted through the mounds of plankton, trying to find the baby squid's microscopic tentacles. At last, he stumbled backward, and put his arms over his head. "It's a fucking catastrophe," he said.

He fell back in the captain's chair, and sat motionless. I tried to think of something to say, but failed. "It was right there," O'Shea said to himself. "I had it."

After a while, he tried to drop the traps in the water again, but he no longer seemed able to muster his strength. "I can't take it anymore," he said, and disappeared into the forward berth.

That afternoon, O'Shea was sitting on the cabin porch, sipping a glass of whiskey. "Want a spot?" he asked.

"That's all right," I said.

He spoke in a whisper, and much more slowly than usual. He said he had pinpointed a new location to search, but I told him I thought I would stay behind and catch up on my work. He looked at me for a long moment. "That's what always happens," he said. "People get bored and give up. But I can't pay any attention to what's going on around me. I just have to stay focussed."

He took a sip of his whiskey. "I can already hear the critics saying, 'The great squid hunter lost his blasted squid again.' Do you know how it feels when everything goes to custard like this?" He fell silent again, then added, "I'm not going to stop. I'm not going to give up. I don't care if someone finds the squid first. I'll *still* go until I find it myself."

The next morning, when he pushed open the cabin door, he looked despairing. "Nothing," he said. "Nothing."

It was the end of the expedition; he had to go back to Auckland to lecture. We loaded up the gear and returned to the city. When we got there, O'Shea went to the aquarium to visit his specimens. In his absence, seventeen squid had died. The employee in whose care he had left them had posted a sign on the tank. It said, "They have a new trick . . . It's called 'jumping out of the tank and committing suicide!'"

O'Shea checked the temperature and salinity of the water in the tank, and offered the remaining squid some sprat. Then we drove to his house. As he got out of his car, he said, "You may want to take a look at this."

He led me into the garage, which was cluttered with tools and appliances. He started to clear off an enormous box. "You better put this on," he said, and handed me a gas mask.

I slipped it over my face, and he opened the top of the bin. Inside was a dead giant squid. "It's a twenty-seven-foot male," he said.

The carcass was ivory white and was floating in embalming fluids; its arms were so long that they were bunched together in folds, and its suckers were the size of a child's fist. "I'm preparing this one for a museum," he said.

He told me that he had buried one squid corpse in his garden, under a patch of watermelons. Leaning over the box, he picked up the dead animal's mantle, which was bigger than he was. "That's the head," he said.

He turned it over, and I could see a massive, lidless eye staring out at us.

"See here, this is the mouth," he said, speaking rapidly again. He stuck his fingers inside the white cusp of flesh, revealing a sharp black beak and a serrated tongue. "It'll cut right through your cartilage," he said.

Though O'Shea didn't have a mask on, he took a deep breath and, with great exertion, lifted half of the creature in his arms. He grabbed a tentacle and started to extend it. "Look at it. They're fantastic, aren't they?"

He ran his fingers up and down its limbs, opening and closing its suckers. For a moment, he shut his eyes, as if he were trying to imagine it underwater. Then he said, "The dead one is beautiful, but it's the live one I want." ♦

AUGUST 11, 1945

LITTLE WING

When homing pigeons leave home.

BY SUSAN ORLEAN

On a bright, breezy Saturday not long ago, Sedona Murphy gave her homing pigeons away. Earlier that morning, the birds had flown around the neighborhood, looping over the shaggy old trees and the peaked rooftops of South Boston before returning to their gray shed in the Murphys' back yard. They then toddled obligingly into their wooden case. These were racing birds, accustomed to being crated and carried, so the close quarters were nothing new, and they had no way of knowing that this was the last time they would ever fly free.

The pigeons were being given away because the Murphys were moving, and the pigeons would not assent to the move. No matter how much nicer the yard would be at the Murphys' new house, in Southborough, a suburb west of Boston, the pigeons would always consider home to be the narrow wooden house on East Fifth Street that the Murphys were leaving behind. If the birds moved to Southborough and ever got out of their coop, they would race back to Fifth Street. Once in a while, pigeons that have to be moved—that is, pigeons whose owners are moving—can bond to a different coop. But, most of the time, birds raised by hand in a coop have no talent for living in the wild, so homing pigeons that have to be moved must be caged for the rest of their lives—they become what are called "prisoners." In the best of circumstances, prisoners are kept in a large aviary, so that they have room to fly even though they can't be let loose; in the worst, they never fly much again.

I got into the Murphys' car with Sedona and her twin brother, Patrick, and their mother, Maggie; the pigeons were in their wooden case in the back seat, muttering to themselves like old men in a bingo hall. The highway was uncrowded. We ticked past several exits, until we were minutes from the headquarters of the South Shore Pigeon Flyers, one of the two dozen or so clubs in Massachusetts for homing-pigeon fanciers, where we would be leaving the birds.

Sedona was quiet. She is thirteen years old, a lean, leggy girl, with the luxuriant golden hair of a princess, but a grave, precise manner. Her posture is elegant. Her diction is occasionally exactly that of a person her age—earlier in the day she had announced, with amazement, that Grand Tetons means "big boobs"—but more often it is startlingly precise and sophisticated. Once when I was visiting her, she was showing one of the pigeons to a friend. The bird was squirming and pecking. Her friend squealed and said she thought the bird was icky. Sedona gave her a look, then turned the bird on its back and said firmly, "Hey! You're being a dominant, dominant bird!"

South Shore Pigeon Flyers is housed in an old brown barn behind the home of the club's president, Damian Levangie. When we pulled in, Levangie was standing on a small terrace off the second floor of the barn, his head tilted up. Maggie called out a greeting. "I can't come down," Levangie said. "I'm waiting for birds." At six that morning, thousands of pigeons from the Boston area had been released near the Berkshire Mountains for a two-hundred-mile race, and Levangie's flock was likely to be reaching home any minute; he would need to lure them across an electronic finish line so that their leg bands would trigger the timer used in official scoring.

"We have Sedona's birds," Maggie said.

"Just leave them," Levangie said. Spotting a flash of wing in the sky,

Sedona Murphy fell in love with

pigeons after receiving some as a gift: "I know people think they're plain or even homely, but I think they're little works of art."

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY ELLEN MARK

he swivelled around and began shaking a can full of grain to attract the birds' attention, so they wouldn't dawdle in the air too long before landing. Maggie and Sedona waited for a bit, but Levangie wasn't budging. Finally, Sedona placed the case of pigeons near the barn, and then climbed into the car. By the time we got back to the Murphys' house, a friend of the family's, Jim Reynolds, was dismantling Sedona's pigeon coop, restoring it to its original incarnation as a garden shed. Sedona stood at a distance, observing. "It looks empty," she said. "Pigeonless." Maggie watched the demolition with her. Out came the perches, the bird bath, the fifty-pound sacks of pigeon feed; off came the Lucite door the birds hopped through after they'd been flying around and were ready to come home.

This is both the marvellous and the problematical thing about racing pigeons: they have a fixed, profound, and nearly incontrovertible sense of home. Americans move, on average, every five years; pigeons almost never move. This gives the hobby of raising homing pigeons a curious permanence, a fixedness in space. It's as if you had pasted your stamp collection on your bedroom walls and then, when it came time to move, you couldn't get it unglued. The Murphys' new house didn't have an aviary, so Maggie felt the best solution was to persuade Sedona to give the pigeons to people in her racing club who did. Other pigeon racers, facing the same problem, decide they just can't move. I spent much of this past racing season with Sedona and with Matt Moceri, who flies his birds with the Gloucester Racing Club, north of Boston. Matt, who is fifty-six, is slight and dark-haired, with a foghorn voice and a cheery manner. He has been raising birds since 1982, and always keeps a flock of at least sixty. Matt has lived in the same house in Gloucester for almost his entire life, but he would love to leave the cold, wet winters there for somewhere pleasant, like Tampa, Florida. He began to feel this most acutely five years ago, when he learned that he had cancer. "My wife wants to get something in Florida before I croak," he said to me recently. "But I can't do it with the birds. They belong to this house."

If, in the Kentucky Derby, all the horses were trucked together to some remote spot and set loose, then galloped back to their respective barns, where they crossed a finish line, and their times were then compared and ranked in order by a race secretary (factoring in the difference in the distances to the various barns), you would have the equivalent of a pigeon race. It is the inverse of a group spectator sport. Birds in a race are all together only when they are first let go, which is done by a truck driver who transports all the competitors—thousands of them, in the big races—to the release point. None of the bird owners watch the start of the race, because the birds travel as fast as sixty miles per hour and they fly direct, so if the owners watched the start of the race they would probably miss being home to see the birds return. There is no gathering of owners to watch the end of the race, either: everyone wants to see his own flock come back to his own coop. "You hang out in the yard by yourself, waiting," a pigeon racer recently explained to me. "You put on some music or the baseball game, have a cocktail, and just watch the friendly skies."

Homing pigeons find their way on instinct, but they need practice. Pigeon racers get up early, because practice sessions—known as "training tosses"—are usually done at dawn, before it's too hot for flying, and most people drive their birds farther and farther away, several days a week, to build their stamina and to strengthen their attachment to home. The American Racing Pigeon Union oversees two racing seasons each year—one in the spring, for birds more than a year old, and one in the fall, for young birds. The races are held regionally each week, and range from one hundred to six hundred miles. Some races have cash awards for winners—up to several thousand dollars in some cases, and one series of races in South Africa has a purse of a million dollars. But, most of the time, you do it just for the thrill of it, and you get nothing but glory.

There are scores of pigeon breeds, all of them varieties of the rock dove, the bird you see in cities. Fancy breeds—such as pigmy pouters, oriental frills, and short-faced tumblers—are raised for show and for performance. Homing pigeons are raised to race home. Their ability to find their way—and their choice to do so—has been remarked upon since before the Roman Empire. The Egyptians and Turks trained pigeons to carry messages; dynastic China used pigeons to carry mail. It is rumored that Count Rothschild used the early news of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, delivered to him by pigeon, to manipulate investments; in the nineteenth century, Paul Julius Reuter founded his news service as a string of pigeon posts; London stock-market quotations were regularly conveyed from London to Antwerp by bird. Pigeons have been used by the German, French, Dutch, English, Belgian, and American armies to carry microfilm and messages. Some military birds conducted surveillance. "If you should ever wake up in the morning and see perched on your window sill an uncanny little bird pointing a miniature camera at you, you might be sure that he was a United States feathered photographer," Marion Cothren wrote in her book "Pigeon Heroes," in 1944. "Not to be outdone by Germany, Russia and Japan, our Pigeon Service trained . . . these birds to carry two-inch aluminum cameras attached to their breasts. . . . These clever camera-birds were used to photograph troops or ammunition dumps." During the Second World War, a pigeon was cited for bravery by the American Army: during a storm, the bird, known as U.S. 1169, carried a distress message to shore from a foundering Coast Guard ves-

JULY 23, 1932

SEPTEMBER 15, 1980

AN OX LOOKS AT MAN

They are more delicate even than shrubs and they run
and run from one side to the other, always forgetting
something. Surely they lack I don't know what
basic ingredient, though they present themselves
as noble or serious, at times. Oh, terribly serious,
even tragic. Poor things, one would say that they hear
neither the song of air nor the secrets of hay;
likewise they seem not to see what is visible
and common to each of us, in space. And they are sad,
and in the wake of sadness they come to cruelty.
All their expression lives in their eyes—and loses itself
to a simple lowering of lids, to a shadow.
And since there is little of the mountain about them—
nothing in the hair or in the terribly fragile limbs
but coldness and secrecy—it is impossible for them
to settle themselves into forms that are calm, lasting,
and necessary. They have, perhaps, a kind
of melancholy grace (one minute) and with this they allow
themselves to forget the problems and translucent
inner emptiness that make them so poor and so lacking
when it comes to uttering silly and painful sounds: desire, love, jealousy
(what do we know?)—sounds that scatter and fall in the field
like troubled stones and burn the herbs and the water,
and after this it is hard to keep chewing away at our truth.

—Carlos Drummond de Andrade

(Translated, from the Portuguese, by Mark Strand.)

sel. Between 1943 and 1949, the Dickin Medal—a British award for animal bravery—was bestowed on thirty-two pigeons, nearly twice the number given to hero dogs.

Pigeon racing, as a competitive sport, was developed in Belgium in the early nineteenth century, when messenger birds were bred to have greater endurance and speed. By the eighteen-eighties, races of five hundred to a thousand miles were held regularly in Europe and the United States. There have been changes in the sport since then. Electronic finish lines were introduced ten years ago; before that, racers had to grab their birds as they entered the coop and remove their leg bands, to stamp them in a manual timer. There is now racing-team software ("Pigeon Loft Organizer . . . a quick and easy way for you to manage all your pigeon data . . . records, pedigrees, race results"). There are husbandry practices to stimulate stronger feather growth. There is pigeon feed on the market that contains magnetic particles, and is touted to help navigation. There are techniques to increase speed, including a system called "widowhood," in which mating pairs are kept apart, to increase their longing for each other—and, accordingly, to increase their haste to get home. But, fundamentally, the sport has remained unchanged for more than a hundred years. It is simply a contest to see whose birds are fastest coming back to their coop.

No one is exactly sure how the birds do it. Scientists have been studying homing pigeons for decades; at Cornell, experiments have been conducted on them since 1967. Inertial routing—the theory that the birds register the physical experience of the journey and retrace it—cannot entirely account for their ability. Nor can navigation by sight (pigeons fitted with translucent contact lenses are still able to find home); sun-compassing (pigeons can find their way home on overcast days); smell; sound; infrasound; telepathy; or magnetic sensitivity. Many biologists now believe that pigeons use some combination of these. The sentimental explanation is that if pigeons like where they live they use all their animal instincts—which are beyond our capacity to measure—to find their way. Sedona believes that magnetism has something to do with it, but she mostly subscribes to this notion. "I believe it's the love of the loft," she told me. "They return to where they feel is their home."

Occasionally, birds get lost. They might be blown off course and can't correct themselves. Cell-phone transmissions are suspected of interfering with their steering. In 1998, about fifteen hundred birds competing in a race from Virginia to Pennsylvania went off course; more than half of them were never seen again, and no one knows why they went astray. At a St. Peter's Fiesta on the north shore of Massachusetts a few years ago, someone released a hundred white pigeons, assuming that they would make a nice addition to the event and would head back home immediately. Weeks after the fiesta ended, the birds were still fluttering around the area, lost and disoriented. One of Sedona's favorite pigeons, Soleil, went missing after a training toss. Sedona says she thinks she's seen him a few times since then, wandering the streets of downtown Boston. Her birds are so attached to her that they will come when she calls, but Soleil seemed to have found a new home.

Most of the time, though, homing pigeons can be counted on. Last fall, I went with Matt Moceri on a training toss with a few dozen of his birds and those of some pigeon-racing friends. He was planning to let the birds go in a parking lot in Greenfield, Massachusetts, about a hundred miles away. It was soon after sunrise when we arrived. There was an emu ranch next to the parking lot, and as we pulled in we could see the birds at the ranch peering at us through the fence. There were about a thousand

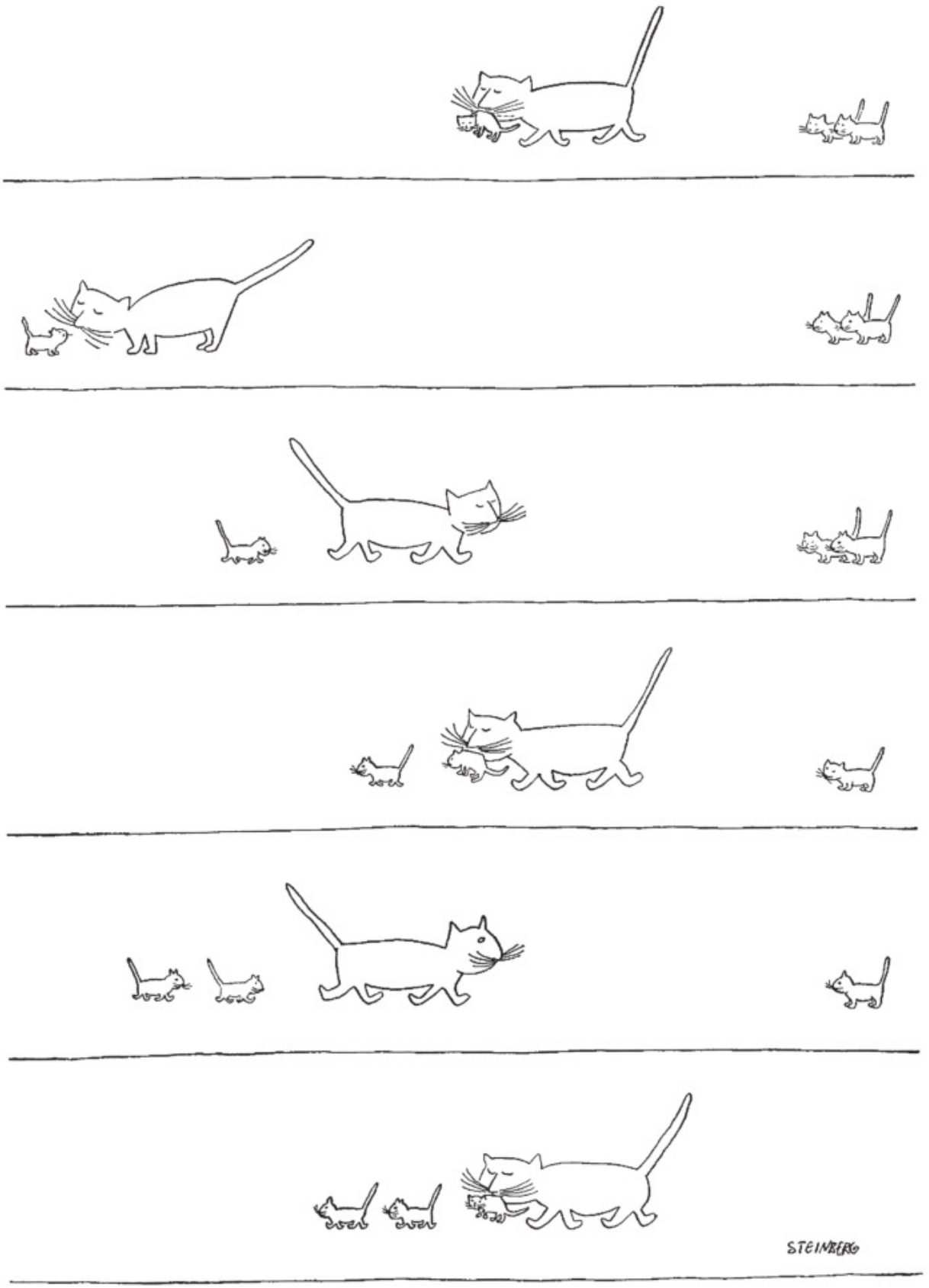
pigeons in the pickup. As soon as Matt opened their cages, the pigeons poured out like water, and then whooshed into the sky and disappeared into the morning. I couldn't believe they would find their way home, or want to. At the very least, I figured, we would have several hours of waiting time in Gloucester before we would catch a glimpse of any of them. But when we got back to Matt's house and walked into his yard, I could see all of his birds lined up on the roof of their coop, burbling and cooing, shuffling and bowing, as if they were performing the finale of a magic trick.

You can buy a racing pigeon for a hundred dollars, or you can spend thirty thousand dollars or more for birds from champion racing stock. In general, the costs are reasonable: pigeon feed is about twenty-five cents a pound; basic gear costs a few hundred dollars; club membership and racing fees are about two hundred and fifty dollars a year. The biggest expenses are an electronic timer, which can run close to a thousand dollars, and veterinary bills, if your birds get sick. Sedona got her first pigeons a couple of years ago, as a gift from a friend of Maggie's, Bill Hussey, who calls his hundred-bird racing team Hussey-N-Da Lofts. Sedona was crazy about animals—at the time, the family already had an Australian shepherd, a cat, and a gecko—and she was especially fascinated by birds. When she was small, she liked to lie on the grass in the park near home and study wild pigeons for hours. To train Sedona's birds for racing, Maggie had to wake at 5 A.M., wait for someone to come and watch the kids, drive the birds as much as an hour away, release them, then drive to police headquarters, where she is a detective, and start her workday. Maggie is divorced from the children's father. "I think my father had a parrot once, but he had to give it away," Sedona said. "I think he was allergic to it, and it didn't like women." Several years ago, the Murphys' neighbors, Jim and Mary Reynolds, began walking the Murphys' dog during the day. The Reynoldses are both deaf and they have no children; walking the Murphys' dog led them to more involvement with Sedona and Patrick, and over time the Reynoldses have become like grandparents to them, babysitting while Maggie is at work, helping with projects around the house. The attachment is powerful. When Maggie told them that they were moving to Southborough, the Reynoldses decided that even though they'd been in the neighborhood for decades it might be time for them to move, too.

Hussey gave Sedona two baby birds, Soleil and Stella Luna, and when she joined South Shore Pigeon Flyers some club members gave her several more. The birds mated; she then had a flock of eighteen. At first, the pigeons lived in the house, in an old rabbit cage, which caused the dog, the cat, and the gecko to be somewhat discomfited. After it became impossible to walk through the kitchen without crunching on pigeon feed, Maggie bought a garden shed to use as a coop. Jim erected it at the far end of the long, narrow back yard. He had grown up nearby, and, as a kid, had friends with homing pigeons, so he knew how to care for them and helped Sedona run the coop. Patrick liked the birds and spent some time with them, but he is more of a dog-and-cat guy; it was Sedona who fell in love. She thought the pigeons were beautiful—"I know people think they're plain or even homely," she said, "but I think they're little works of art"—and she loved seeing them in competition. She raced her young birds in the one- and two-hundred-mile races. She lost a few to hawks and to misdirection, and a few more to a virus that spread through the birds in the club, and she knew she was up against grownups with flocks of two hundred pedigreed racing champions, but she was still proud of her birds. One day when I was visiting her, she showed the birds to me, lifting and turning them every which way so that I could see their features, commenting on each one's potential with the meticulousness of an auctioneer touting yearling colts at Keeneland. "This one's texture is really excellent. . . . This one's coloration is called a white grizzle, a beautiful bird. . . . This one has a proud chest. . . . This one, Patches, is too fat. We have to get her on a diet. . . . Lightning has very good genetics."

By this time, Maggie had already made the decision to move: a hopscotch of packing boxes stretched from the front to the back door, and real-estate pamphlets lay in a heap on the kitchen table. It hadn't been an easy decision: the house had been in Maggie's family since the early nineteen-hundreds. But the neighborhood had changed, Maggie explained to me. Everyone she knew was moving away, and the new neighbors were the type to scold her kids for goofing around too close to their yards or playing tag in the street. She had found a handsome old house in Southborough, on almost an acre of land. It would give them all sorts of space, compared with South Boston, where the houses crowd in on one another.

Sedona plays baseball and soccer, and is an accomplished ballerina, but giving up the birds was a blow. Figuring them out was more compelling to her than figuring out how to hit a line drive or perform a jeté. Even when she knew that she would never again see her pigeons floating over the top of the house and zooming back to the coop, she doted on them, dreamily speculating about which birds might have made a mark in the races. Her successes had been modest—her best finish was her bird S.J., who came in forty-ninth in a race of three hundred birds. But, still, the possibilities seemed limitless. One hot afternoon near the end of summer, we sat out near the coop talking about the move. She allowed as how the new house was big and nice, and then she changed the subject and said she wanted to give the birds a bath and show me how affectionate they were with her, almost like dogs. The coop was tiny—we just fit in, crowding through the door—but it was clean and pleasant, filled with the odd, almost noiseless sound of the birds, a sort of cadenced vibration, like an unplugged electric guitar being strummed. Sedona picked up a dappled tan pigeon and hugged it close. "You know," she said, "you


STEINBERG

can actually become a millionaire from your birds."

There persists in Sedona's mind the possibility that she will get her birds back someday—that she and her mother will build a huge aviary at the new house, and even though the birds would be prisoners they would live there happily. Recently, she has also said she might consider raising show pigeons, rather than pressing her mother to reclaim the birds she gave away. She thinks show pigeons are gorgeous; she had seen one riding on the back of a dog at a circus and was very impressed. Moreover, they are fat and placid, flying in somersaults if they fly at all, rather than always yearning to race home.

As a pigeon flyer, Sedona is atypical. Fans of the sport are mostly male and largely middle-aged or older. The pigeon clubs are clubby. The motto of the Greater Boston Homing Pigeon Concourse—the governing body of the pigeon clubs in the Boston area—is "Camaraderie Through Competition." On the nights before races, members gather at their clubhouses to wait for the truck to collect their birds, but also to play cribbage, watch sports on TV, have a few drinks, tell dirty jokes. Maggie preferred to take Sedona and her birds to the South Shore Pigeon Flyers headquarters early; they would chat for a short time and head right home. Pigeon devotees have included Mike Tyson, Walt Disney, Picasso (who named one of his daughters Paloma, which is Spanish for dove), Marlon Brando (as Terry Malloy in "On the Waterfront"), Roy Rogers, and King George V. Pigeon racing is not demographically diverse but it is multinational. In Belgium, its popularity is said to be on a par with cycling and soccer; it is thriving in England (where not long ago one exceptional racing pigeon sold for nearly two hundred thousand dollars) and in the rest of Europe (where videotapes about pigeon-racing stars like Marcel Sangers, "the Wonderboy of Holland," are marketed with taglines like "Racing in the hotbed of Zutphen against some of the sport's giants, Marcel has achieved what many can only dream about"). The sport is fashionable in the Middle East, and the Taiwanese have gone mad for it. Prize money in Taiwan's biggest races can reach three million dollars, and gambling on them is commonplace; so is pigeon-related crime, including stringing gigantic nets across the route of a race and holding the trapped birds for ransom, and sneaking birds onto airplanes to hurry them to the finish line. Sharing affection for pigeons seems to fill people with an all-embracing global emotion. "Whatever language and whatever country you're in," the president of the American Racing Pigeon Union, Frank Greenhall, said recently, "you sit down with a pigeon man and you speak one language—pigeon."

The American Racing Pigeon Union has ten thousand members and oversees eight hundred clubs around the country; another several hundred clubs are affiliated with the International Federation of American Homing Pigeon Fanciers. Still, the numbers aren't what they once were—for instance, there are about half as many members in Boston-area clubs as there were twenty years ago. Where have all the pigeon flyers gone? Some complain of weariness with the never-ending care that the sport requires, compared with a pastime like golf, and it has also become more difficult lately to keep a pigeon coop—concerns about disease and about whether the sport violates animal rights have prompted some cities to start regulating coops, and Chicago has made it unlawful to keep pigeons at all. The resurgence of hawks has made some people quit in frustration after their well-trained racing teams get eaten. But, recently, newcomers from China and Vietnam have begun joining the sport in the United States, and people who love pigeons see other signs to be hopeful. Last summer, I went to Fall River, Massachusetts, to attend the annual auction and picnic at the racing club there. Greenhall was addressing the crowd. "People keep saying the sport is dying, but the sport is bigger than ever before," he said, over the din of kids shouting at each other in the SpongeBob SquarePants bounce house, a group of men discussing the virtues of the birds being auctioned, and people jostling in line for barbecue. "For instance," Greenhall continued, "we are close to having the Boy Scouts recognize pigeon racing as a merit badge. . . . We have nine school sys-

tems using pigeons to teach math and science." He looked around the picnic, nodding with satisfaction, and added, "We even have prisons starting pigeon racing!"

There are just a handful of female pigeon flyers, but what really set Sedona apart was her age. She was well known in the Boston pigeon-racing world because there are so few kids in the sport. I once asked her if that distinction was actually kind of cool. "The other people in the club were not exactly fun," she said, slowly. "But they were, um, interesting." The pigeon people I met found their failure to interest their own children in it exasperating. They said their children thought pigeons were too much work; they complained that their kids were only into computers, that their sons were only interested in girls. Some people I met had first taken up pigeon racing as children and then abandoned it, and had returned to it later in life. I thought this would have assured them that their kids would eventually find their way to the sport. But many of them had an uneasiness, a foreboding that, regardless of the good news about the Boy Scouts and math classes and prisons, and the fact that more people are joining the sport as families these days, it is on the wane. That worry seemed to be also an expression of their ambivalence about a pastime that is unusually confining. The morning of the Greenfield training toss, I waited for Matt in the parking lot of a Wal-Mart, along with five other pigeon racers. It was five-forty-five in the morning. I asked one of the racers how he was, and he said, "Honestly, I'm tired. I mean . . . I'm driving out here and I'm asking myself, I'm getting up at 5 A.M. for some bird?"

Matt is the race secretary of the Greater Boston Homing Pigeon Concourse, and yet he confided to me that he thinks he is starting to talk himself out of being a pigeon racer. Still, even though he has set his birds free and watched them return hundreds and hundreds of times, he seems exhilarated each time they lift into the air and then miraculously reappear at home. That morning in the parking lot, he was eager to take the birds out to Greenfield and let them fly. "Hey, let's get these birds and get going!" he hollered. "We're four minutes late already!"

The day we went to Greenfield, some of Matt's other birds were flying in a race. The release was in Ilion, New York, about two hundred miles from Boston—224.592 miles from Matt's coop, to be exact, for purposes of calculating their time and speed. Matt was

rushing back to Gloucester so he could see his flock come home. He was feeling optimistic, even though he was not having the best season of his career. "Since I've been sick, I haven't done so well, so everyone likes me," he said, slapping the steering wheel. "When my birds were doing really well, there was lots of envy. With pigeon guys, there are always lots of feuds." His cell phone rang. "Birds went up at seven-forty-five," he said. "O.K., good luck." Within a minute, the phone rang again; he gave the same message. During the rest of the drive back to Gloucester, his phone rang every few moments. Matt was in a philosophical mood. Before he became ill, he did construction and remodelling work; now he devotes his time to tending his birds and puttering around the house and speculating about the future. His wife, Joan, often drives to the training tosses, because he tires easily. She probably has more pigeon business in her life than she counted on. Matt underwent chemotherapy, and for a year he was too sick to clean the coop and feed the birds, so Joan did it all herself and developed a lung condition that can be caused by exposure to bird dander. Their vacations are limited to times when they can find someone to bird-sit. "And whenever we do go on vacation, I spend some time doing pigeons," Matt said. "I leave Joan at the pool and go find some pigeon guys. I have to."

The day was hot and still. When we got back to Gloucester, we sat in the yard, listening to the cicadas click and the leaves on a huge maple tree beside his house rustle and sigh. I mentioned what a beautiful tree it was. "Well, it is," Matt said. "It's just that it blocks my view of the birds when they're heading in." He had a cordless phone next to him, which rang every few minutes. "Hello, Louie. . . . No, I don't have any birds yet. . . . O.K., good luck." He checked his watch, checked the sky, checked his watch again. The phone rang again. "No, John, I don't have any yet." Another ring. He turned the ringer off, saying he didn't want to know whose birds were back. His own team was late. "I'm disgusted," he said. "I don't want to talk to anybody."

I asked Matt if he knew Sedona; he remembered meeting her briefly, at a pigeon auction. I wondered if he had considered taking some of her birds. He laughed. "No way," he said, shaking his head. He mentioned that he and Joan would be vacationing in Tampa soon; their son had agreed to take care of the pigeons. Increasingly, Tampa is where pigeon guys go to retire; Frank Greenhall told me that a subdivision near Tampa has been nicknamed Little Belgium, because of all the pigeon fanciers who have moved in. Maybe while they were down there, Matt said, he and Joan would look at real estate. On a day like this, with his team underperforming, the idea of moving seemed more palatable, maybe even appealing. "I love my birds," he said, "but I always wonder why I'm doing this." He suddenly bolted to his feet, pointing past the maple. "I got a bird!" he yelled. I could see a dark shape gliding around the crown of the tree, spiralling downward; then a bird landed on top of the coop. It was glossy and gray, with pink feet and bright, round eyes. It had just flown two hundred miles on instinct or memory, or perhaps it was drawn back these two hundred miles because it loved where it lived. It was unruffled, composed, as if it had spent the whole morning scratching for feed at home. "C'mon, c'mon," Matt called out, until the bird crossed the finish line, registering its return at 13:15:42. He took a huge breath and then grabbed his phone, hit the speed dial, and shouted, "Hey! Louie! I got a bird!" ♦

JULY 24, 1937

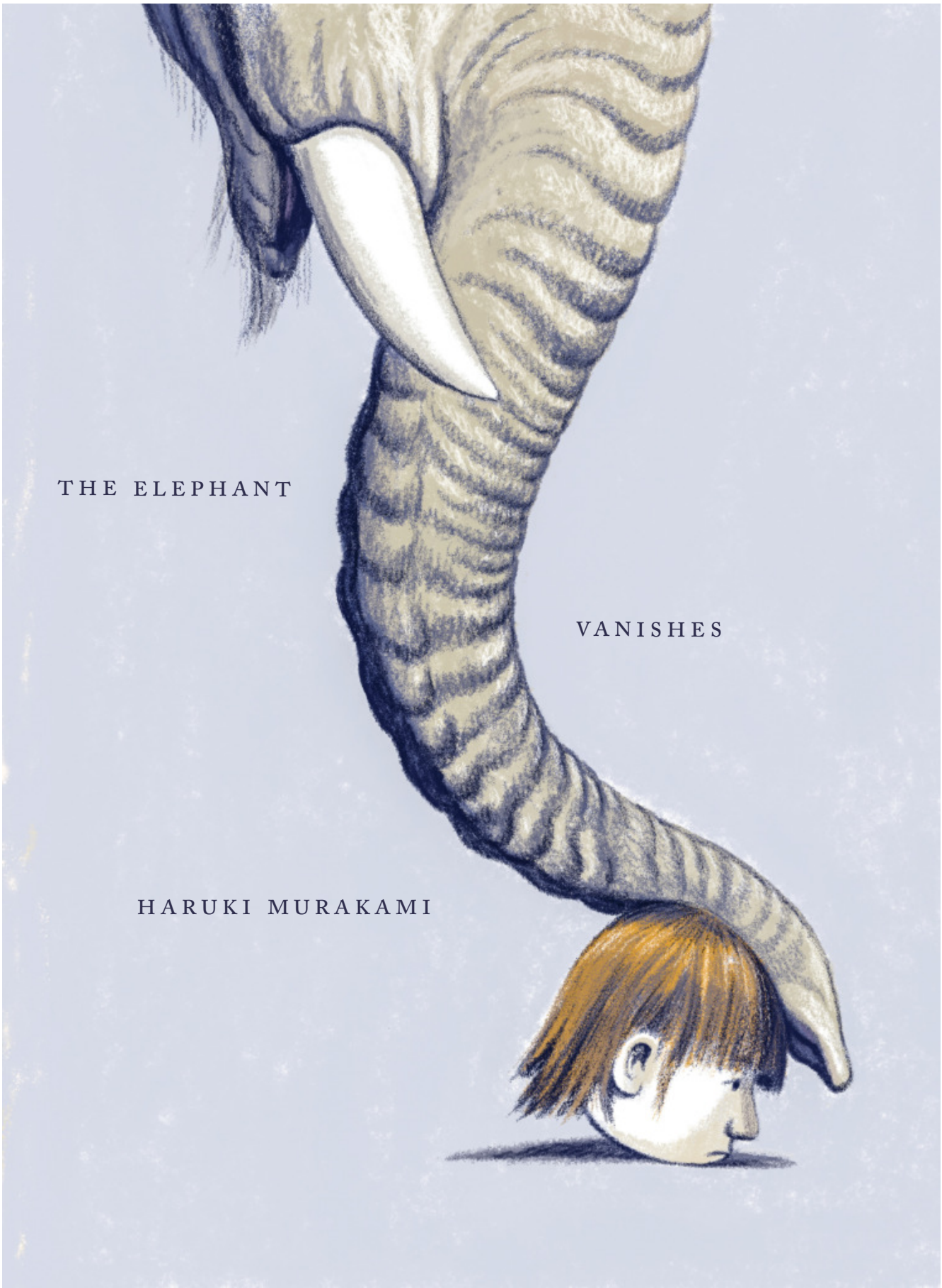


ILLUSTRATION BY JILLIAN TAMAKI

When the elephant disappeared from our town's elephant house, I read about it in the newspaper. My alarm clock woke me that day, as always, at six-thirteen. I went to the kitchen, made coffee and toast, turned on the radio, spread the paper out on the kitchen table, and proceeded to munch and read. I'm one of those people who read the paper from beginning to end, in order, so it took me a while to get to the article about the vanishing elephant. The front page was filled with stories on S.D.I. and the trade friction with America, after which I plowed through the national news, international politics, economics, letters to the editor, book reviews, real-estate ads, sports reports, and finally the regional news.

The elephant article was the lead story in the regional section. The unusually large headline caught my eye: "ELEPHANT MISSING IN TOKYO SUBURB," and, beneath that, in type one size smaller, "Citizens' Fears Mount. Some Call for Probe." There was a photo of policemen inspecting the empty elephant house. Without the elephant, something about the place seemed wrong. It looked bigger than it needed to be, blank and empty like some huge, dehydrated beast from which the innards had been plucked.

Brushing away my toast crumbs, I studied every line of the article. The elephant's absence had first been noticed at two o'clock on the afternoon of May 18th—the day before—when men from the school-lunch company delivered their usual truckload of food (the elephant mostly ate leftovers from the lunches of children in the local elementary school). On the ground, still locked, lay the steel shackle that had been fastened to the elephant's hind leg, as though the elephant had slipped out of it. Nor was the elephant the only one missing. Also gone was its keeper, the man who had been in charge of the elephant's care and feeding from the start.

According to the article, the elephant and keeper had last been seen sometime after five o'clock the previous day (May 17th) by a few pupils from the elementary school, who were visiting the elephant house, making crayon sketches. These pupils must have been the last to see the elephant, said the paper, since the keeper always closed the gate to the elephant enclosure when the six-o'clock siren blew.

There had been nothing unusual about either the elephant or its keeper at the time, according to the unanimous testimony of the pupils. The elephant had been standing where it always stood, in the middle of the enclosure, occasionally wagging its trunk from side to side or squinting its wrinkly eyes. It was such an awfully old elephant that its every move seemed a tremendous effort—so much so that people seeing it for the first time feared it might collapse at any moment and draw its final breath.

The elephant's age had led to its adoption by our town a year earlier. When financial problems caused the little private zoo on the edge of town to close its doors, a wildlife dealer found places for the other animals in zoos throughout the country. But all the zoos had plenty of elephants, apparently, and not one of them was willing to take in a feeble old thing that looked as if it might die of a heart attack at any moment. And so, after its companions were gone, the elephant stayed alone in the decaying zoo for nearly four months with nothing to do—not that it had had anything to do before.

This caused a lot of difficulty, both for the zoo and for the town. The zoo had sold its land to a developer, who was planning to put up a high-rise condo building, and the town had already issued him a permit. The longer the elephant problem remained unresolved, the more interest the developer had to pay for nothing. Still, simply killing the thing would have been out of the question. If it had been a spider monkey or a bat, they might have been able to get away with it, but the killing of an elephant would have been too hard to cover up, and if it ever came out afterward the repercussions would have been tremendous. And so the various parties had met to deliberate on the matter, and they formulated an agreement on the disposition of the old elephant:

(1) The town would take ownership of the elephant at no cost.

(2) The developer would, without compensation, provide land for housing the elephant.

(3) The zoo's former owners would be responsible for paying the keeper's wages.

I had had my own private interest in the elephant problem from the very outset, and I kept a scrapbook with every clipping I could find on it. I had even gone to hear the town council's debates on the matter, which is why I am able to give such a full and accurate account of the course of events. And while my account may prove somewhat lengthy, I have chosen to set it down here in case the handling of the elephant problem should bear directly upon the elephant's disappearance.

When the mayor finished negotiating the agreement—with its provision that the town would take charge of the elephant—a movement opposing the measure boiled up from within the ranks of the opposition party (whose very existence I had never imagined until then). "Why must the town take ownership of the elephant?" they demanded of the mayor, and they raised the following points (sorry for all these lists, but I use them to make things easier to understand):

(1) The elephant problem was a question for private enterprise—the zoo and the developer; there was no reason for the town to become involved.

(2) Care and feeding costs would be too high.

(3) What did the mayor intend to do about the security problem?

(4) What merit would there be in the town's having its own elephant?

"The town has any number of responsibilities it should be taking care of before it gets into the business of keeping an elephant—sewer repair, the purchase of a new fire engine, etc.," the opposition group declared, and while they did not say it in so many words, they hinted at the possibility of some secret deal between the mayor and the developer.

In response, the mayor had this to say:

(1) If the town permitted the construction of high-rise condos, its tax revenues would increase so dramatically that the cost of keeping an elephant would be insignificant by comparison; thus it made sense for the town to take on the care of this elephant.

(2) The elephant was so old that it neither ate very much nor was likely to pose a danger to anyone.

(3) When the elephant died, the town

would take full possession of the land donated by the developer.

(4) The elephant could become the town's symbol.

The long debate reached the conclusion that the town would take charge of the elephant after all. As an old, well-established residential suburb, the town boasted a relatively affluent citizenry, and its financial footing was sound. The adoption of a homeless elephant was a move that people could look upon favorably. People like old elephants better than sewers and fire engines.

I myself was all in favor of having the town care for the elephant. True, I was getting sick of high-rise condos, but I liked the idea of my town's owning an elephant.

A wooded area was cleared, and the elementary school's aging gym was moved there as an elephant house. The man who had served as the elephant's keeper for many years would come to live in the house with the elephant. The children's lunch scraps would serve as the elephant's feed. Finally, the elephant itself was carted in a trailer to its new home, there to live out its remaining years.

I joined the crowd at the elephant-house dedication ceremonies. Standing before the elephant, the mayor delivered a speech (on the town's development and the enrichment of its cultural facilities); one elementary-school pupil, representing the student body, stood up to read a composition ("Please live a long and healthy life, Mr. Elephant"); there was a sketch contest (sketching the elephant thereafter became an integral component of the pupils' artistic education); and each of two young women in swaying dresses (neither of whom was especially good-looking) fed the elephant a bunch of bananas. The elephant endured these virtually meaningless (for the elephant, entirely meaningless) formalities with hardly a twitch, and it chomped on the bananas with a vacant stare. When it finished eating the bananas, everyone applauded.

On its right rear leg, the elephant wore a solid, heavy-looking steel cuff from which there stretched a thick chain perhaps thirty feet long, and this in turn was securely fastened to a concrete slab. Anyone could see what a sturdy anchor held the beast in place: the elephant could have struggled with all its might for a hundred years and never broken the thing.

I couldn't tell if the elephant was bothered by its shackle. On the surface, at least, it seemed all but unconscious of the enormous chunk of metal wrapped around its leg. It kept its blank gaze fixed on some indeterminate point in space, its ears and the few white hairs on its body waving gently in the breeze.

The elephant's keeper was a small, bony old man. It was hard to guess his age; he could have been in his early sixties or late seventies. He was one of those people whose appearance is no longer influenced by their age after they pass a certain point in life. His skin had the same darkly ruddy, sunburned look both summer and winter, his hair was stiff and short, his eyes were small. His face had no distinguishing characteristics, but his almost perfectly circular ears stuck out on either side with disturbing prominence.

He was not an unfriendly man. If someone spoke to him he would reply, and he expressed himself clearly. If he wanted to he could be almost charming—though you always knew he was somewhat ill at ease. Generally, he remained a reticent, lonely-looking old man. He seemed to like the children who visited the elephant house, and he worked at being nice to them, but the children never really warmed to him.

The only one who did that was the elephant. The keeper lived in a small prefab room attached to the elephant

house, and all day long he stayed with the elephant, attending to its needs. They had been together for more than ten years, and you could sense their closeness in every gesture and look. Whenever the elephant was standing there blankly and the keeper wanted it to move, all he had to do was stand next to the elephant, tap it on a front leg, and whisper something in its ear. Then, swaying its huge bulk, the elephant would go exactly where the keeper had indicated, take up its new position, and continue staring at a point in space.

On weekends, I would drop by the elephant house and study these operations, but I could never figure out the principle on which the keeper-elephant communication was based. Maybe the elephant understood a few simple words (it had certainly been living long enough), or perhaps it received its information through variations in the taps on its leg. Or possibly it had some special power resembling mental telepathy and could read the keeper's mind. I once asked the keeper how he gave his orders to the elephant, but the old man just smiled and said, "We've been together a long time."

And so a year went by. Then, without warning, the elephant vanished. One day it was there, and the next it had ceased to be.

I poured myself a second cup of coffee and read the story again from beginning to end. Actually, it was a pretty strange article—the kind that might excite Sherlock Holmes. "Look at this, Watson," he'd say, tapping his pipe. "A very interesting article. Very interesting indeed."

What gave the article its air of strangeness was the obvious confusion and bewilderment of the reporter. And this confusion and bewilderment clearly came from the absurdity of the situation itself. You could see how the reporter had struggled to find clever ways around the absurdity in order to write a "normal" article. But the struggle had only driven his confusion and bewilderment to a hopeless extreme.

For example, the article used such expressions as "the elephant escaped," but if you looked at the entire piece it became obvious that the elephant had in no way "escaped." It had vanished into thin air. The reporter revealed his own conflicted state of mind by saying that a few "details" remained "unclear," but this was not a phenomenon that could be disposed of by using such ordinary terminology as "details" or "unclear," I felt.

First, there was the problem of the steel cuff that had been fastened to the elephant's leg. This had been found *still locked*. The most reasonable explanation for this would be that the keeper had unlocked the ring, removed it from the elephant's leg, *locked the ring again*, and run

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off with the elephant—a hypothesis to which the paper clung with desperate tenacity despite the fact that the keeper had no key! Only two keys existed, and they, for security's sake, were kept in locked safes, one in police headquarters and the other in the firehouse, both beyond the reach of the keeper—or of anyone else who might attempt to steal them. And even if someone had succeeded in stealing a key, there was no need whatever for that person to make a point of returning the key after using it. Yet the following morning both keys were found in their respective safes at the police and fire stations. Which brings us to the conclusion that the elephant pulled its leg out of that solid steel ring without the aid of a key—an absolute impossibility unless someone had sawed the foot off.

The second problem was the route of escape. The elephant house and grounds were surrounded by a massive fence nearly ten feet high. The question of security had been hotly debated in the town council, and the town had settled upon a system that might be considered somewhat excessive for keeping one old elephant. Heavy iron bars had been anchored in a thick concrete foundation (the cost of the fence was borne by the real-estate company), and there was only a single entrance, which was found locked from the inside. There was no way the elephant could have escaped from this fortresslike enclosure.

The third problem was elephant tracks. Directly behind the elephant enclosure was a steep hill, which the animal could not possibly have climbed, so even if we suppose that the elephant somehow managed to pull its leg out of the steel ring and leap over the ten-foot-high fence, it would still have had to escape down the path to the front of the enclosure, and there was not a single mark anywhere in the soft earth of that path that could be seen as an elephant's footprint.

Riddled as it was with such perplexities and labored circumlocutions, the newspaper article as a whole left but one possible conclusion: the elephant had not escaped. It had vanished.

Needless to say, however, neither the newspaper nor the police nor the mayor was willing to admit—openly, at least—that the elephant had vanished. The police were continuing to investigate, their spokesman saying only that the elephant either "was taken or was allowed to escape in a clever, deliberately calculated move. Because of the difficulty involved in hiding an elephant, it is only a matter of time till we solve the case." To this optimistic assessment he added that they were planning to search the woods in the area with the aid of local hunters' clubs and sharpshooters from the national Self-Defense Force.

The mayor had held a news conference, in which he apologized for the inadequacy of the town's police resources. At the same time, he declared, "Our elephant-security system is in no way inferior to similar facilities in any zoo in the country. Indeed, it is far stronger and far more fail-safe than the standard cage." He also observed, "This is a dangerous and senseless anti-social act of the most malicious kind, and we cannot allow it to go unpunished."

As they had the year before, the opposition-party members of the town council made accusations. "We intend to look into the political responsibility of the mayor; he has colluded with private enterprise in order to sell the townspeople a bill of goods on the solution of the elephant problem."

One "worried-looking" mother, thirty-seven, was interviewed by the paper. "Now I'm afraid to let my children out to play," she said.

The coverage included a detailed summary of the steps leading to the town's decision to adopt the elephant, an aerial sketch of the elephant house and grounds, and brief histories of both the elephant and the keeper who had vanished with it. The man, Noboru Watanabe, sixty-three, was from Tateyama, in Chiba Prefecture. He had worked for many years as a keeper in the mammalian section of the zoo, and "had the complete trust of the zoo authorities, both for his abundant knowledge of these animals and for his warm, sincere personality." The elephant had been sent from East Africa twenty-two years earlier, but little was known about its exact age or its "personality." The report concluded with a request from the police for citizens of the town to come forward with any information they might have regarding the elephant.

I thought about this request for a while

"Save me for thirty years, bring me every place you move, and in return, at the end of that time, I'll be exactly what you need for five minutes."

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as I drank my second cup of coffee, but I decided not to call the police—both because I preferred not to come into contact with them if I could help it and because I felt the police would not believe what I had to tell them. What good would it do to talk to people like that, who would not even consider the possibility that the elephant had simply vanished?

I took my scrapbook down from the shelf, cut out the elephant article, and pasted it in. Then I washed the dishes and left for the office.

I watched the search on the seven-o'clock news. There were hunters carrying large-bore rifles loaded with tranquillizer darts, Self-Defense Force troops, policemen, and firemen combing every square inch of the woods and hills in the immediate area as helicopters hovered overhead. Of course, we're talking about the kind of "woods" and "hills" you find in the suburbs outside Tokyo, so they didn't have an enormous area to cover. With that many people involved, a day should have been more than enough to do the job. And they weren't searching for some tiny homicidal maniac: they were after a huge African elephant. There was a limit to the number of places a thing like that could hide. But still they had not managed to find it. The chief of police appeared on the screen, saying, "We intend to continue the search." And the anchorman concluded the report, "Who released the elephant, and how? Where have they hidden it? What was their motive? Everything remains shrouded in mystery."

The search went on for several days, but the authorities were unable to discover a single clue to the elephant's whereabouts. I studied the newspaper reports, clipped them all, and pasted them in my scrapbook—including editorial cartoons on the subject. The album filled up quickly, and I had to buy another. Despite their enormous volume, the clippings contained not one fact of the kind that I was looking for. The reports were either pointless or off the mark: "ELEPHANT STILL MISSING," "GLOOM THICK IN SEARCH HQ," "MOB BEHIND DISAPPEARANCE?" And even articles like this became noticeably scarcer after a week had gone by, until there was virtually nothing. A few of the weekly magazines carried sensational stories—one even hired a psychic—but they had nothing to substantiate their wild headlines. It seemed that people were beginning to shove the elephant case into the large category of "unsolvable mysteries." The disappearance of one old elephant and one old elephant keeper would have no impact on the course of society. The earth would continue its monotonous rotations, politicians would continue issuing unreliable proclamations, people would continue yawning on their way to the office, children would continue studying for their college-entrance exams. Amid the endless surge and ebb of everyday life, interest in a missing elephant could not last forever. And so a number of unremarkable months went by, like a tired army marching past a window.

Whenever I had a spare moment, I would visit the house where the elephant no longer lived. A thick chain had been wrapped round and round the bars of the yard's iron gate, to keep people out. Peering inside, I could see that the elephant-house door had also been chained and locked, as though the police were trying to make up for having failed to find the elephant by multiplying the layers of security on the now empty elephant house. The area was deserted, the previous crowds having been replaced by a flock of pigeons resting on the roof. No one took care of the grounds any longer, and thick, green summer grass had sprung up there as if it had been waiting for this opportunity. The chain coiled around the door of the elephant house reminded me of a huge snake set to guard a ruined palace in a thick forest. A few short months without its elephant had given the place an air of doom and desolation that hung there like a huge, oppressive rain cloud.

I met her near the end of September. It had been raining that day from morning to night—the kind of soft, monotonous, misty rain that often falls at that time of year, washing away bit by bit the memories of summer burned into the earth. Coursing down the gutters, all those memories flowed into the sewers and rivers, to be carried to the deep, dark ocean.

We noticed each other at the party my company threw to launch its new advertising campaign. I work for the P.R. section of a major manufacturer of electrical appliances, and at the time I was in charge of publicity for a coördinated line of kitchen equipment, which was scheduled to go on the market in time for the autumn-wedding and winter-bonus seasons. My job was to negotiate with several women's magazines for tie-in articles—not the kind of work that takes a great deal of intelligence, but I had to see to it that the articles they wrote didn't smack of advertising. When magazines gave us publicity, we rewarded them by placing ads in their pages. They scratched our backs, we scratched theirs.

As an editor of a magazine for young housewives, she had come to the party for material for one of these "articles." I happened to be in charge of showing her around, pointing out the features of the colorful refrigerators and coffeemakers and microwave ovens and juicers that a famous Italian designer had done for us.

"The most important point is unity," I explained. "Even the most beautifully designed item dies if it is out of balance with its surroundings. Unity of design, unity of color, unity of function: this is what today's *kit-chin* needs above all else. Research tells us that a housewife spends the largest part of her day in the *kit-chin*. The *kit-chin* is her workplace, her study, her living room. Which is why she does all she can to make the *kit-chin* a pleasant place to be. It has nothing to do with size. Whether it's large or small, one fundamental principle governs every successful *kit-chin*, and that principle is unity. This is the concept underlying the design of our new series. Look at this cooktop, for example. . . ."

She nodded and scribbled things in a small notebook, but it was obvious that she had little interest in the material, nor did I have any personal stake in our new cooktop. Both of us were doing our jobs.

"You know a lot about kitchens," she said when I was finished. She used the Japanese word, without picking up on "*kit-chin*."

"That's what I do for a living," I answered with a professional smile. "Aside from that, though, I do like to cook. Nothing fancy, but I cook for myself every day."

"Still, I wonder if unity is all that necessary for a kitchen."

"We say '*kit-chin*,'" I advised her. "No big deal, but the company wants us to use the English."

"Oh. Sorry. But still, I wonder. Is

unity so important for a *kit-chin*? What do *you* think?"

"My personal opinion? That doesn't come out until I take my necktie off," I said with a grin. "But today I'll make an exception. A kitchen probably *does* need a few things more than it needs unity. But those other elements are things you can't sell. And in this pragmatic world of ours, things you can't sell don't count for much."

"*Is* the world such a pragmatic place?"

I took out a cigarette and lit it with my lighter.

"I don't know—the word just popped out," I said. "But it explains a lot. It makes work easier, too. You can play games with it, make up neat expressions: 'essentially pragmatic,' or 'pragmatic in essence.' If you look at things that way, you avoid all kinds of complicated problems."

"What an interesting view!"

"Not really. It's what everybody thinks. Oh, by the way, we've got some pretty good champagne. Care to have some?"

"Thanks. I'd love to."

As we chatted over champagne, we realized we had several mutual acquaintances. Since our part of the business world was not a very big pond, if you tossed in a few pebbles one or two were bound to hit a mutual acquaintance. In addition, she and my kid sister happened to have graduated from the same university. With markers like this to follow, our conversation went along smoothly.

She was unmarried, and so was I. She was twenty-six, and I was thirty-one. She wore contact lenses, and I wore glasses. She praised my necktie, and I praised her jacket. We compared rents and complained about our jobs and salaries. In other words, we were beginning to like each other. She was an attractive woman, and not at all pushy. I stood there talking with her for a full twenty minutes, unable to discover a single reason not to think well of her.

As the party was breaking up, I invited her to join me in the hotel's cocktail lounge, where we settled in to continue our conversation. A soundless rain went on falling outside the lounge's panoramic window, the lights of the city sending blurry messages through the mist. A damp hush held sway over the nearly empty cocktail lounge. She ordered a frozen Daiquiri and I had a Scotch-on-the-rocks.

Sipping our drinks, we carried on the kind of conversation that a man and woman have in a bar when they have just met and are beginning to like each other. We talked about our college days, our tastes in music, sports, our daily routines.

Then I told her about the elephant. Exactly how this happened, I can't recall. Maybe we were talking about something having to do with animals, and that was the connection. Or maybe, unconsciously, I had been looking for someone—a good listener—to whom I could present my own, unique view on the elephant's disappearance. Or, then again, it might have been the liquor that got me talking.

In any case, the second the words left my mouth, I knew that I had brought up one of the least suitable topics I could have found for this occasion. No, I should never have mentioned the elephant. The topic was—what?—too complete, too closed.

I tried to hurry on to something else, but, as luck would have it, she was more interested than most in the case of the vanishing elephant, and once I admitted that I had seen the elephant many times she showered me with questions—what kind of elephant was it, how did I think it had escaped, what did it eat, wasn't it a danger to the community, and so forth.

I told her nothing more than what everybody knew from the news, but she seemed to sense constraint in my tone of voice. I had never been good at telling lies.

As if she had not noticed anything strange about my behavior, she sipped her second Daiquiri and asked, "Weren't you shocked when the elephant disappeared? It's not the kind of thing that somebody could have predicted."

"No, probably not," I said. I took a pretzel from the mound in the glass dish on our table, snapped it in two, and ate half. The waiter replaced our ashtray with an empty one.

She looked at me expectantly. I took out another cigarette and lit it. I had quit smoking three years earlier but had begun again when the elephant disappeared.

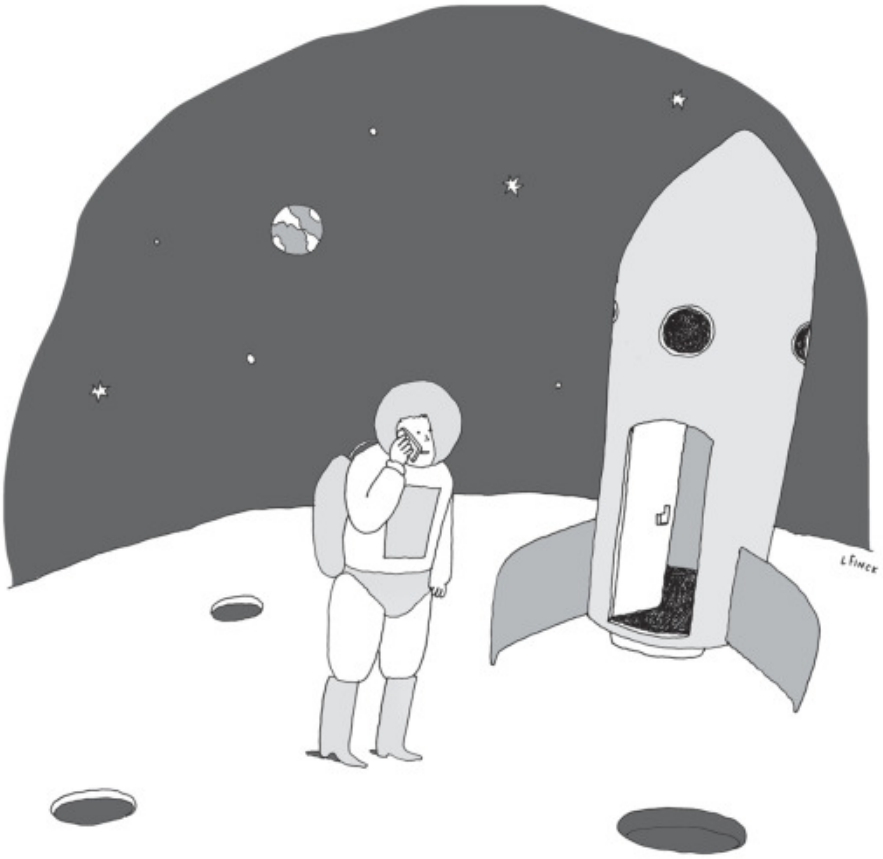
"Why 'probably not'? You mean you could have predicted it?"

"No, of course I couldn't have predicted it," I said with a smile. "For an elephant to disappear all of a sudden one day—there's no precedent, no need, for such a thing to happen. It doesn't make any logical sense."

"But still, your answer was very strange. When I said, 'It's not the kind of thing that somebody could have predicted,' you said, 'No, probably not.' Most people would have said, 'You're right,' or 'Yeah, it's weird,' or something. See what I mean?"

I sent a vague nod in her direction and raised my hand to call the waiter. A kind of tentative silence took hold

"I've told you again and again, just stick to your stupid card tricks."



"Hi, Mom, we just landed."

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as I waited for him to bring me my next Scotch.

"I'm finding this a little hard to grasp," she said softly. "You were carrying on a perfectly normal conversation with me until a couple of minutes ago—at least until the subject of the elephant came up. Then something funny happened. I can't understand you anymore. Something's wrong. Is it the elephant? Or are my ears playing tricks on me?"

"There's nothing wrong with your ears," I said.

"So then it's you. The problem's with you."

I stuck my finger in my glass and stirred the ice. I like the sound of ice in a whiskey glass.

"I wouldn't call it a 'problem,' exactly. It's not that big a deal. I'm not hiding anything. I'm just not sure I can talk about it very well, so I'm trying not to say anything at all. But you're right—it's very strange."

"What do you mean?"

It was no use: I'd have to tell her the story. I took one gulp of whiskey and started.

"The thing is, I was probably the last one to see the elephant before it disappeared. I saw it after seven o'clock on the evening of May 17th, and they noticed it was gone on the afternoon of the eighteenth. Nobody saw it in between, because they lock the elephant house at six."

"I don't get it. If they closed the house at six, how did you see it after seven?"

"There's a kind of cliff behind the elephant house. A steep hill on private property, with no real roads. There's one spot, on the back of the hill, where you can see into the elephant house. I'm probably the only one who knows about it."

I had found the spot purely by chance. Strolling through the area one Sunday afternoon, I had lost my way and come out at the top of the cliff. I found a little flat open patch, just big enough for a person to stretch out in, and when I looked down through the bushes there was the elephant-house roof. Below the edge of the roof was a fairly large vent opening, and through it I had a clear view of the inside of the elephant house.

I made it a habit after that to visit the place every now and then to look at the elephant when it was inside the house. If anyone had asked me why I bothered doing such a thing I wouldn't have had a decent answer. I simply enjoyed watching the elephant during its private time. There was nothing more to it than that. I couldn't see the elephant when the house was dark inside, of course, but in the early hours of the evening the keeper would have the lights on the whole time he was taking care of the elephant, which enabled me to study the scene in detail.

What struck me immediately when I saw the elephant and keeper alone together was the obvious liking they had for each other—something they never displayed when they were out before the public. Their affection was evident in every gesture. It almost seemed as if they stored away their emotions during the day, taking care not to let anyone notice them, and took them out at night when they could be alone. Which is not to say that they did anything different when they were by themselves inside. The elephant just stood there, as blank as ever, and the keeper would perform those tasks one would normally expect him to do as a keeper: scrubbing down the elephant with a deck broom, picking up the elephant's enormous droppings, cleaning up after the elephant ate. But there was no way to mistake the special warmth, the sense of trust between them. While the keeper swept the floor, the elephant would wave its trunk and pat the keeper's back. I liked to watch the elephant doing that.

"Have you always been fond of elephants?" she asked. "I mean, not just that particular elephant?"

"Hmm . . . come to think of it, I do like elephants," I said. "There's something about them that excites me. I guess I've always liked them. I wonder why."

"And that day, too, after the sun went down, I suppose you were up on the hill by yourself, looking at the elephant. May—what day was it?"

"The seventeenth. May 17th at 7 P.M. The days were already very long by then, and the sky had a reddish glow, but the lights were on in the elephant house."

"And was there anything unusual about the elephant or the keeper?"

"Well, there was and there wasn't. I can't say exactly. It's not as if they were standing right in front of me. I'm probably not the most reliable witness."

"What did happen, exactly?"

I took a swallow of my now somewhat watery Scotch. The rain outside the windows was still coming down, no stronger or weaker than before, a static element in a landscape that would never change.

"Nothing happened, really. The elephant and the keeper were doing what they always did—cleaning, eating, playing around with each other in that friendly way of theirs. It wasn't what they *did* that was different. It's the way they looked. Something about the balance between them."

"The balance?"

"In size. Of their bodies. The elephant's and the keeper's. The balance seemed to have changed somewhat. I had the feeling that to some extent the difference between them had shrunk."

She kept her gaze fixed on her Daiquiri glass for a time. I could see that the ice had melted and the water was working its way through the cocktail like a tiny ocean current.

"Meaning that the elephant had gotten smaller?"

"Or the keeper had gotten bigger. Or both simultaneously."

"And you didn't tell this to the police?"

"No, of course not," I said. "I'm sure they wouldn't have believed me. And if I had told them I was watching the elephant from the cliff at a time like that I'd have ended up as their Number One suspect."

"Still, are you *certain* that the balance between them had changed?"

"Probably. I can only say 'probably.' I don't have any proof, and, as I keep saying, I was looking at them through the air vent. But I had looked at them like that I don't know how many times before, so it's hard for me to believe that I could make a mistake about something as basic as the relation of their sizes."

In fact, I had wondered at the time whether my eyes were playing tricks on me. I had tried closing and opening them and shaking my head, but the elephant's size remained the same. It definitely looked as if it had shrunk—so much so that at first I thought the town might have got hold of a new, smaller elephant. But I hadn't heard anything to that effect, and I would never have missed any news reports about elephants. If this was not a new elephant, the only possible conclusion was that the old elephant had, for one reason or another, shrunk. As I watched, it became obvious to me that this smaller elephant had all the same gestures as the old one. It would stamp happily on the ground with its right foot while it was being washed, and with its now somewhat narrower trunk it would pat the keeper on the back.

It was a mysterious sight. Looking through the vent, I had the feeling that a different, chilling kind of time was flowing through the elephant house—but nowhere else. And it seemed to me, too, that the elephant and the keeper were gladly giving themselves over to this new order that was trying to envelop them—or that had already partially succeeded in enveloping them.

Altogether, I was probably watching the scene in the elephant house for less than half an hour. The lights went out at seven-thirty—much earlier than usual—and, from that point on, everything was wrapped in darkness. I waited in my spot, hoping that the lights would go on again, but they never did. That was the last I saw of the elephant.

"So, then, you believe that the elephant kept shrinking until it was small enough to escape through the bars, or else that it simply dissolved into nothingness. Is that it?"

"I don't know," I said. "All I'm trying to do is recall what I saw with my own eyes, as accurately as possible. I'm

hardly thinking about what happened after that. The visual image I have is so strong that, to be honest, it's practically impossible for me to go beyond it."

That was all I could say about the elephant's disappearance. And, just as I had feared, the story of the elephant was too particular, too complete in itself to work as a topic of conversation between a young man and woman who had just met. A silence descended upon us after I had finished my tale. What subject could either of us bring up after a story about an elephant that had vanished—a story that offered virtually no openings for further discussion? She ran her finger around the edge of her cocktail glass, and I sat there reading and rereading the words stamped on my coaster. I never should have told her about the elephant. It was not the kind of story you could tell freely to anyone.

"When I was a little girl, our cat disappeared," she offered after a long silence. "But still, for a cat to disappear and for an elephant to disappear—those are two different stories."

"Yeah, really. There's no comparison. Think of the size difference."

Thirty minutes later, we were saying goodbye outside the hotel. She suddenly remembered that she had left her umbrella in the cocktail lounge, so I went up in the elevator and brought it down to her. It was a brick-red umbrella with a large handle.

"Thanks," she said.

"Good night," I said.

That was the last time I saw her. We talked once on the phone after that, about some details in her tie-in article. While we spoke, I thought seriously about inviting her out for dinner, but I ended up not doing it. It just didn't seem to matter one way or the other.

I felt like this a lot after my experience with the vanishing elephant. I would begin to think I wanted to do something, but then I would become incapable of distinguishing between the probable results of doing it and of not doing it. I often get the feeling that things around me have lost their proper balance, though it could be that my perceptions are playing tricks on me. Some kind of balance inside me has broken down since the elephant affair, and maybe that causes external phenomena to strike my eye in a strange way. It's probably something in me.

The papers print almost nothing about the elephant anymore. People seem to have forgotten that their town once owned an elephant. The grass that took over the elephant enclosure has withered now, and the area has the feel of winter. ♦

(Translated, from the Japanese, by Jay Rubin.)

JANUARY 21, 1939

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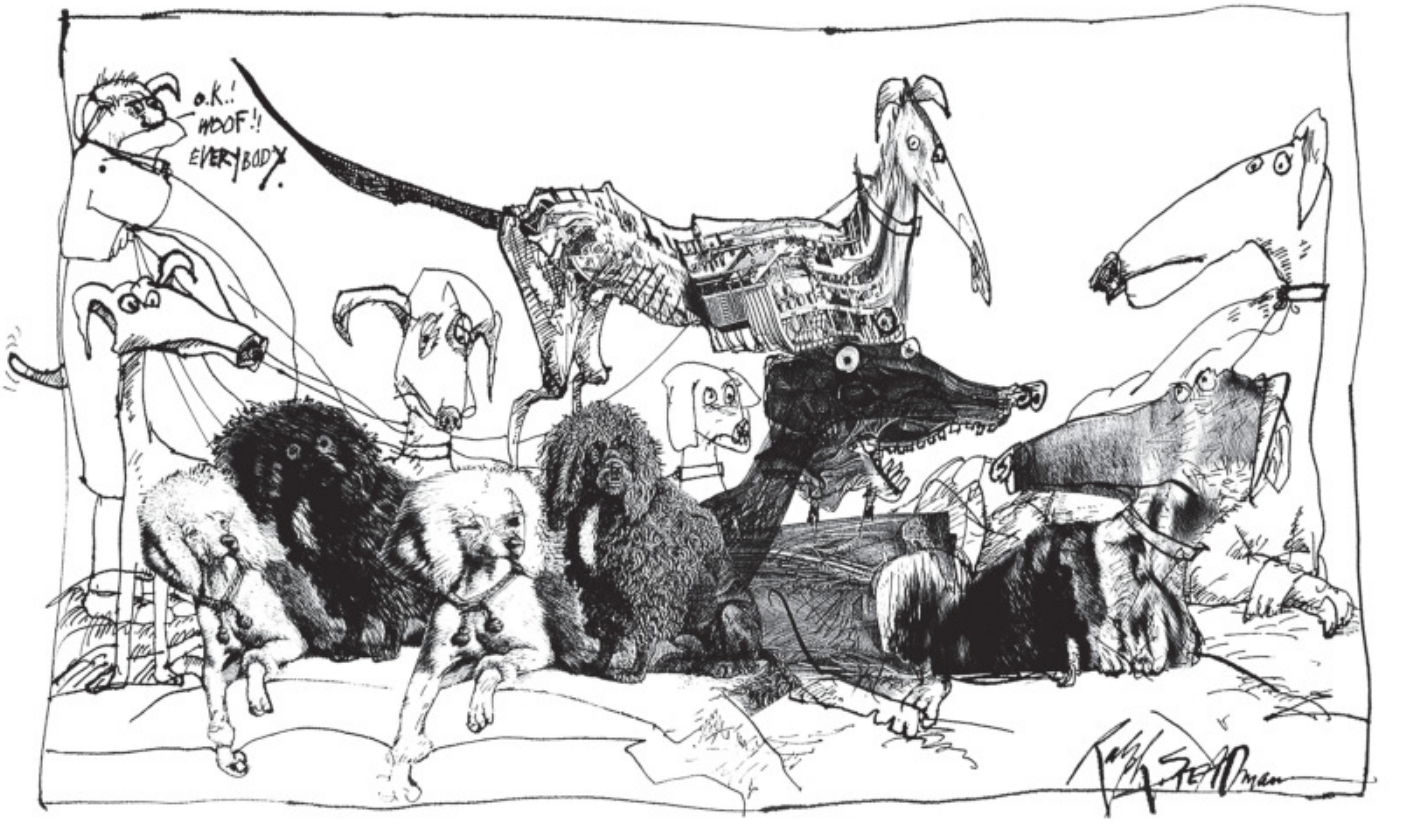


BOOKS FEBRUARY 3, 2003

BARK

Do dogs have history?

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

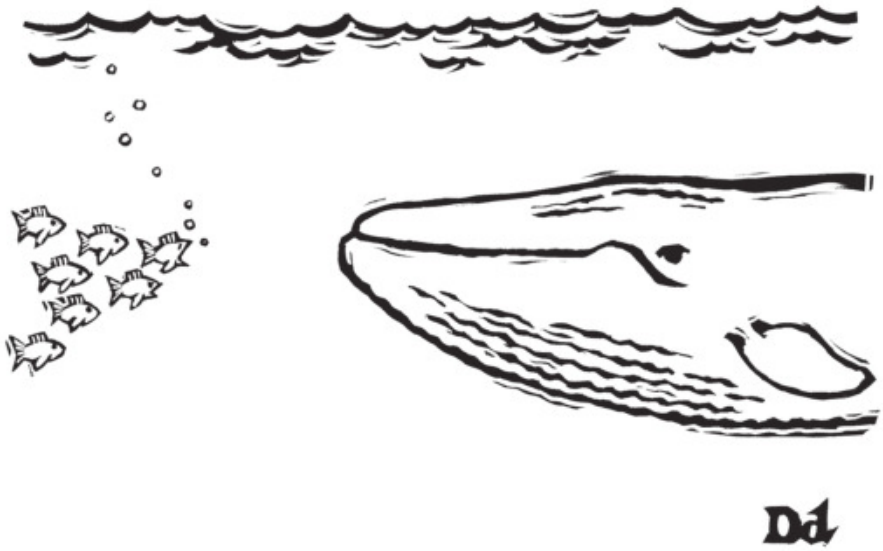
Stanley Coren, a psychologist and dog trainer, is haunted by a primal scene. He pictures a distant ancestor, clothed in skins, huddled by a tiny fire. Next to the ancestor sits a dog, its pointed ears pricked for sounds of danger—sounds too faint for the man to hear. "What do you hear, my dog?" the ancestor says. "You will tell me if I should worry?" Then, Coren writes, "his rough hand reached out and stroked the dog's fur, and that touch made them both feel content."

Coren is the author of several books about dogs—"The Intelligence of Dogs," "What Do Dogs Know?," "Why We Love the Dogs We Do," and "How to Speak Dog." He is the host of "Good Dog!," a Canadian television show. But his most recent book, "The Pawprints of History" (Free Press; $26), is his first attempt to do justice to the primal scene—to come to grips with the fourteen thousand years that man and dog have lived together. It is Coren's mission to set the record straight: he is indignant that conventional historians had ignored the canine contribution, as though, all these years, dogs had just been standing around, wagging their tails. "Pawprints of History" is not just a story; it is an homage. Historians must look carefully, in the crannies of the past, to find the dogs of yore. "The pawprints of many dogs are there," Coren writes, "but they are faint, and the winds of time erase them if they are not found and preserved." Dogs, like women before them, have been confined, illiterate and voiceless, to the domestic sphere, and so dog history, like women's history, must be found in private places.

But do dogs really have history? Of course, things have happened to dogs, and dogs have caused things to happen, and dog breeds have changed over time. But has dogginess itself

Stanley Coren's "The Pawprints of History" argues that canine experience, like female experience, has long been erased.

ILLUSTRATION BY RALPH STEADMAN



"Bad timing—yawning is contagious!"

• •

changed? Dogs have been treated well and treated badly, thrown into battle and laid on sofas and bred into unnatural shapes, and yet each new birth produces a litter of Edenic puppies that develop entirely unaffected by their ancestors' ambiguous past. Can there be history without resentment? Without, at the very least, some sign of evolving irritation or pride at the way dog life has, in the course of things, turned out? One wonders what a modern dog would think, for instance, about the reign of the shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, born in the Year of the Dog, 1646. Tsunayoshi felt so strongly about the welfare of dogs that he instituted the Laws of Compassion to protect them. Under these laws, not only injuring or killing but even ignoring a dog might be punished by death, and many people were forced to commit ritual suicide as a consequence. In one particularly rigorous month in 1687, more than three hundred people were put to death for violating the Laws of Compassion, and, in the course of Tsunayoshi's thirty-year reign, somewhere between sixty thousand and two hundred thousand people were either put to death or exiled for animal-welfare violations. Was this good for the dogs or bad for the dogs? There is no debate. Dogs have no ideas on the subject.

Still, whether or not dogs have their own history, there is no question that they have left their pawprints on ours. Had it not been for timely canine intervention, Coren shows, Columbus might never have made inroads into the New World, Henry VIII might never have founded the Church of England, and the American Revolution might never have happened. Take Columbus, for example. Columbus believed that for fighting Indians one dog was worth fifty soldiers, so when he advanced into America he took a pack of two-hundred-and-fifty-pound mastiffs with him. In one industrious battle in 1495, these mastiffs leaped upon and disembowelled more than a hundred Indians apiece. (This figure was reported by an observer of the fight, Bartolomé de las Casas, who, realizing that it was difficult to credit, went on to explain that the dogs were used to disembowelling deer and boars, and so found the soft and hairless skin of Indians quite easy to bite into.)

Or take the Church of England. Henry VIII wanted the Pope to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, so he sent Cardinal Wolsey to the Vatican to negotiate. Everything was going fine, the story goes, and Wolsey kneeled to kiss the Pope's toe, but, just then, Wolsey's greyhound, Urian (whom Wolsey had, oddly, brought with him), charged forward and bit down hard on the papal foot. This injury put an end to the negotiations, Henry was not granted his divorce, and the English Reformation followed shortly afterward. Coren's case for the canine origins of the American Revolution is, admittedly, somewhat more inventive, having to do with the fact that, in the fourteenth century, Robert the Bruce, of Scotland, was saved from death by one of his Talbots. Had Robert not been saved, Coren reasons, the Scottish Stuarts would not have taken over the English throne, and porphyria, the hereditary disease that afflicted mad King George III, would not have entered the English royal line. Thus, with English monarchs behaving more rationally, things might have been worked out in a friendly way with the rebellious colonials.

For all the human lives that dogs have saved—and among those rescued from certain death are Lewis and Clark (charging buffalo, Newfoundland), Alexander the Great (charging elephant, greyhound), Napoleon (stormy sea, Newfoundland), Abraham Lincoln (dark cave, mutt)—the history of the species has been a history of oppression. In the nineteenth century, dogs were used in restaurant kitchens to run in large wheels that turned the spits for roasting meat over a fire. One story has it that, during a church service in Bath, the Bishop of Gloucester, who was giving the sermon, uttered the line "It was then that Ezekiel saw the wheel," and at the mention of the word "wheel" several turnspit dogs, who had been brought to church as foot warmers, ran for the door.

Dogs have had their defenders—most notably, the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. "The day *may come*, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny," Bentham wrote in 1789, the year that the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the American Bill of Rights were drafted. He went on:

> The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come some day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin,

or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. . . .The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?

Eventually, dogs acquired rights. Henry Bergh, a wealthy American dilettante, took up the canine cause and in 1866 founded the A.S.P.C.A. One of his chief concerns was preventing the use of dogs to turn spits (although twice when he showed up at restaurants to make sure they were no longer using dogs for this purpose he discovered that they had started using black children instead). Dogs acquired rights, but they still had a respect problem. The notion of dogs thinking was considered ridiculous. Part of the problem was Clever Hans. Clever Hans was a notorious horse who lived a hundred years ago in Germany, and acquired his name because he could solve simple mathematical problems and had a working knowledge of German. His owner would pose a question, and Clever Hans would answer by tapping with his hoof. The horse caused a sensation, and many took his prowess as proof that the intelligence of animals had been woefully underestimated. But then a little-known psychologist named Oskar Pfungst conducted a series of experiments showing that, by observing his questioners and picking up tiny signs of relaxation in their posture, Clever Hans had detected when it was time to stop tapping; when given a problem by someone who didn't know the answer, he was stumped. Ever since, many psychologists and animal behaviorists, reluctant to be twice fooled, have followed Descartes in his refusal to attribute to animals any conscious intelligence whatever. Only recently have animal behaviorists realized that science, in heeding Cartesian dogma more than the demonstrable ingenuity of animals such as Clever Hans, had got its logic backward: it had put Descartes before the horse.

But do we want dogs to be clever? Intelligence seems like a good thing in a pet, the way that more power in a computer or extra controls on a camera seem like good things. But Coren points out that, just as extra controls on a camera can be confusing, and, in the hands of the amateur, a humble Instamatic might yield better pictures, so sometimes an owner may be better off with a dog that is not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

It can, for instance, be more difficult to train clever dogs, since clever dogs respond more precisely to words. Consider the case of Shadow, a golden retriever of unusual acuity. One day in obedience class, he was commanded by an inexperienced boy, "Come on, Shadow, sit down!" Shadow looked uncertain for a moment; then he lowered his rear end to the ground and his chest nearly as far down, and began with his front paws to drag himself in that position toward the boy, whimpering as he went. The obedience instructor was puzzled by this strange behavior, until he realized that Shadow—brilliantly, tragically—was trying to come, sit, and lie down all at once. But, more than ease of training, there is the question of stimulation. The old eat-walk-sleep routine may be fine for a King Charles spaniel that doesn't mind confining its horizons to a block or two, but a Border collie or a German shepherd in the same position might become restless. And not only is it a nuisance to have a dog that addresses its determination and intelligence to techniques of escape; it's also depressing. Who wants to share a house with a creature whose only thought is to leave? One that is not satisfied with scraps of time and food but dreams perpetually of forests and lampposts?

In "How to Speak Dog," Coren discusses, with diagrams, ear talk, eye talk, scent talk, and tail talk, and he appends a "visual glossary and doggish phrasebook." He parses the subtleties of tail-wagging, explaining the shades of meaning that distinguish the slight tail wag ("I see you looking at me. You like me, don't you?") from the broad tail wag ("I like you") and the slow tail wag, with tail at half-mast ("I want to know what you mean, but I just can't quite figure it out"). He explains that the tail, even

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when not wagging, can be verbose. What is a dog saying when it holds its tail almost horizontal, pointing away from its body but not stiff? "Something interesting may be happening here." Up and slightly curved over the back? "I'm top dog." Down, near hind legs, but with the legs bent slightly inward? "I'm feeling a bit insecure." Coren also elucidates common human-canine misunderstandings. He observes, for instance, that licking often isn't kissing but, rather, a gesture of respect or a sign that the licker is experiencing stress. Yawning, likewise, does not, in a dog, indicate boredom but may be a gesture on the part of a dominant dog to a lesser one that it does not intend him harm. (Coren himself has yawned at a threatened, hostile dog in a successful attempt to get it to stop growling at him.)

Once, Coren was telephoned by a woman named Josephine, who was having trouble with her Rottweiler, Bluto. The problem was that Bluto was too affectionate. When Josephine's husband, Vincent, was around, he would behave, but when Vincent went to work Bluto wouldn't leave Josephine alone. He would put a paw on her knee; he would gaze into her eyes; he would sit very close on the sofa and lean against her, and if she moved away to make room for him he would follow and lean on her again. Josephine would stroke him on his head, but it seemed that nothing she could do satisfied his longing for love. When Coren arrived at her house to assess the situation for himself, however, he realized that Bluto was not demonstrating affection at all. The paw on the knee, the staring down, the leaning—all these were gestures designed to convey to Josephine that Bluto was of a higher status in the household than she was. And, alas, Josephine's response—the stroke on the head—was, in dog language, classically submissive, akin to the humble lick that a low-status dog or a puppy would give a dominant dog to show that it knew its place. Coren told Josephine that she had to force Bluto into submission.

Motivating "How to Speak Dog" is the Franciscan fantasy of talking to animals. But would talking to dogs be a good thing? If dogs could talk, the question of obedience in a case like Bluto's might become politically awkward, and even Coren is no weak sentimentalist about obedience. "Never give the dog anything for free," he commands darkly. "Before you feed the dog, make it sit; before you pet it, make it sit; before the dog gets to go out the door, make it sit. . . . Random repetition is important, not simply as practice for the commands but also as reinforcement for the idea that the dog must pay attention to you and follow instructions without question." Dogs may have their history, but they must not be allowed to cherish ideas above their station. When Coren encountered an insubordinate Labrador named Bradley while teaching an obedience class, he instructed Bradley's owners to topple him over and prevent him from getting up, even if that required sitting on him, for a minimum of five minutes, twice a day. If Bradley failed to respond to a command, they were to roll him onto his side and stare him in the eye for fifteen seconds. Within weeks, Bradley was a new dog.

If dogs could talk, what would they say? They might be dull. Or brutal. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote of the dog, "His silence has won for him a higher name for virtue than his conduct justifies." But, as long as animals don't talk, it doesn't matter if they're brutal. When it comes to animals, we are all multiculturalists. Even the most devout vegan doesn't lose sleep over the carnage taking place in nature—doesn't lift a finger to try to stop lions or tigers shredding their prey in the most gruesome and painful fashion. Would we like dogs more if we could talk to them? Some of the best writing about animals consists of expressions of bafflement. The philosopher Thomas Nagel wrote an essay titled "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," in which he pointed out the difference between the difficulty of imagining what it would be like for him to be a bat (how it would feel to hang upside down in the dark, or to fly about and steer by sound, and so on) and the utter impossibility of imagining what it is like for a bat to be a bat. This is one of the appealing things about dogs. Alien creatures around the house produce a kind of domestic sublime, a shiver of mental wilderness. We are often told that trouble between people is the product of poor communication, and if only we knew how to talk to each other harmony would result. But dog love suggests the opposite. Dog love is perfect because there is no talking at all.

In the early years of the last century, Hachiko, an Akita with a well-developed sense of time, got into the habit of meeting his master, Professor Eisaburo Ueno, of Tokyo University, every day when he arrived from work at the Shibuya subway station. Ueno died in 1925, but Hachiko continued to meet his train every day for nine years, until he himself died, in 1934. The world's most famous Skye terrier, Greyfriars Bobby, remained by his master's grave in Edinburgh for fourteen years, until his own death, in 1872. There are dogs who have committed voluntary suttee. It goes without saying that a human being who attempted to behave in any of these ways would be urged to stop and, with some hand-wringing, be hospitalized. But dogs are permitted to love unrequited and to excess. Dogs who love too much, codependent dogs, or clingy, pathetic dogs are not reproved. Love and altruism are never pathological in a dog.

Witness this testimonial by the novelist J. R. Ackerley to his German shepherd, Queenie. "I don't believe there was anything special about her, except that she was rather a beauty," Ackerley wrote. "She offered me what I had never found in my sexual life, constant, single-hearted, incorruptible, uncritical devotion. . . . She placed herself entirely under my control. From the moment she established herself in my heart and home, my obsession with sex fell wholly away from me. . . . I never prowled the London streets again, nor had the slightest inclination to do so. On the contrary, whenever I thought of it, I was positively thankful to be rid of it all, the anxieties, the frustrations, the wastage of time and spirit. . . . I was just under fifty when this animal came into my hands, and the fifteen years she lived with me were the happiest of my life."

Queenie didn't talk, and Ackerley didn't want her to. Sometimes pawprints are enough. ♦

BOOKS SEPTEMBER 7, 1946

FARM TO FABLE

George Orwell's animal allegory.

BY EDMUND WILSON

"Animal Farm," by George Orwell (Harcourt, Brace), is a satirical animal fable about the progress—or backsliding—of the Russian Revolution. If you are told that the story deals with a group of cows, horses, pigs, sheep, and poultry which decide to expel their master and run his farm for themselves but eventually turn into something almost indistinguishable from human beings, with the pigs as a superior caste exploiting the other animals very much as the farmer did, and if you hear that Stalin figures as a pig named Napoleon and Trotsky as a pig named Snowball, you may not think it sounds particularly promising. But the truth is that it is absolutely first-rate. As a rule, I have difficulty in swallowing these modern animal fables; I can't bear Kipling's stories about the horses that resist trade-unionism and the beehive that is ruined by Socialism, nor have I ever been able to come under the spell of "The Wind in the Willows." But Mr. Orwell has worked out his theme with a simplicity, a wit, and a dryness that are closer to La Fontaine and Gay, and has written in a prose so plain and spare, so admirably proportioned to his purpose, that "Animal Farm" even seems very creditable if we compare it with Voltaire and Swift.

Mr. Orwell, before the war, was not widely known in America or even, I think, in England. He is one of several English writers who were only just beginning to be recognized in those years of confusion and tension and whose good work was obscured and impeded while the war was going on. But I think that he is now likely to emerge as one of the ablest and most interesting writers that the English have produced in this period, and, since he is now getting a reputation in this country, I should like to recommend to publishers that they look up his early novels and memoirs. There is a novel of his called "Burmese Days," a title deceptively suggestive of reminiscences by a retired official, which is certainly one of the few first-hand and really excellent pieces of fiction that have been written about India since Kipling. Orwell's book is not the set piece and tour de force that E. M. Forster's "A Passage to India" was; but the author, who was born in Bengal and served in the Burmese police, is "saturated" with his subject, where Forster had to get his up. This book (which, I understand, was allowed to appear in England only in a text that had been modified under pressure of the India Office) attracted, so far as I remember, no attention whatever when it came out over here, but it ought certainly to be republished, with a more striking and appropriate title. It is illuminating as a picture of Burma and distinguished as a work of literature. ♦

Orwell's prose is so admirably proportioned to his purpose that the book can be credibly compared to Voltaire and Swift.

ILLUSTRATION BY KAROLIS STRAUTNIEKAS

THE THEATRE NOVEMBER 24, 1997

ANIMAL MAGNETISM

Disney takes the high road to profit.

BY JOHN LAHR

Julie Taymor's staging of "The Lion King" submerges us in a mythic universe.

"The fairground booth is eternal. Its heroes do not die; they simply change their aspects and assume new forms," the great Russian avant-garde director Vsevolod Meyerhold once said. With its noise, its novelty, its love of the grotesque, and its vivid design of movement, the fairground is a revolt against the deadliness of naturalism and an invitation for the public to play. This spirit has reëmerged, improbably, on West Forty-second Street, in the shape of an entire stylized menagerie of animals for Disney's "The Lion King," which opened last week at the sumptuously renovated New Amsterdam Theatre, under the bold scenic and sculptural hand of Julie Taymor, an avant-gardist who has been enlisted in the commercial ranks. (She earned her spurs in the early seventies as an apprentice to the Open Theatre's Joe Chaikin and the Bread and Puppet Theatre's Peter Schumann; she subsequently lived in Indonesia for four years, studying traditional and experimental puppetry.) With the show clearing a pre-opening advance of about twenty million dollars, Taymor has proved to Disney that taking the high theatrical road can be a good business decision. Here, on a superb protean set by Richard Hudson, she uses a wide range of puppet styles, African-inspired fabrics, Zulu chants, and a grab bag of borrowed but effective avant-garde staging tricks to turn "The Lion King" into a theatrical event far more textured and original than the film. The musical is a series of truly *vivants tableaux*—part pageant, part puppet show, part parade, with a touch of Las Vegas revue thrown in—telling the story of Simba, a princely lion cub who loses his kingdom, goes into exile, and returns to claim his inheritance from his epicene, malevolent Uncle Scar, a pooftah in the pride. The lineaments of the plot touch loosely on Adam, on Oedipus, and on the prodigal son, but what is really dramatized is not so much the longing for a return to paradise as the longing for a return of theatre to the extraordinary.

In film, audiences expect the unexpected, which is manufactured for them. They pay, but they don't play; their thrill is technological but not, in the fullest sense, imaginative. However, from the moment the animals arrive majestically onstage, called from the wings and down the aisles to Pride Rock for the birth of Simba by a mesmerizing Zulu chant and response led by Rafiki, the mandrill-shaman (well played and sung by Tsidii Le Loka), the story is liberated from its soppy, hidebound cartoon naturalism. In the opening number, "Circle of Life," Taymor submerges the audience in a mythic universe; it's like being in a dream awake. Here the stage picture aspires to the sacred as much as to the spectacular. The air fills with the sound of African drumming, marimbas, and balophones, and the saffron sun rises out of a gray daybreak, as the animals make their slow, reverent, astonishing appearance. They are ingenious, beautifully painted constructions, made from materials like fibreglass, rope, clay, and foam rubber, which are harnessed to the actors and guided by them. This poetic interplay between puppeteer and puppet, where the human being is always visible within the animal, is, Taymor says, "a cubis-

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANCO ZACHA

tic event, because the audience experiences the art from several perspectives." On close inspection, for instance, the giraffe's torso turns out to be a man on stilts, bent forward at a forty-five-degree angle in order to operate the front legs, which are attached to his arms; leaping gazelles are conjured up in miniature on a carrousel of rotating wheels that is pushed across the stage; Scar's mask is positioned above and behind the actor's head, and it can tilt forward almost two feet in front of his face to intensify his intrusive menace; and, perhaps best of all, the cheetah—whose back legs are strapped to the legs of its handler, Lana Gordon, while the front of the torso is controlled by her head and hands—glides stealthily across the savanna. Are the animals human or are the humans animal? As in a naïve painting, the boundaries blur after a while into a teeming, surreal anthropomorphic universe.

Taymor's scenic genius brings poetry to a story that is, essentially, kiddie pulp. In one exquisite stage picture, the audience stares out at an expanse of grassland; then the grass slowly rises from the ground to reveal an African chorus, with boxes of grass balanced on its many heads. The singers move in diagonals around the stage while puppeteers, racing between the rows of this moving meadow with miniatures of Simba and his father, Mufasa, give the illusion that the lions are running on the plains. It's an image of overwhelming lyric beauty, and it resonates far beyond the bounds of the story. In another scene, a backdrop of painted wildebeests and a series of rollers on which miniature wildebeests of increasing size revolve create the sensational impression of a wildebeest stampede; there's also a thrilling visual moment when one of Simba's sidekicks, a miniature of the motormouth meerkat Timon (well handled by Max Casella, who really gets into it), falls from a limb above a waterfall into a pool of snapping crocodiles. Taymor does lose her way in Simba's "I Just Can't Wait to Be King," a silly fantasia that takes the story nowhere, and in the embarrassing aerial love ballet (a kind of cabaret trapeze turn) that accompanies Garth Fagan's earthbound choreography for "Can You Feel the Love Tonight." In general, however, the mind is filled with such an exhilarating sense of wonder that the gee-whizzery of the banal spoken English—"Carnivores. Oy!" Timon exclaims—hardly seems to matter.

Indeed, the show's high visual style is in sharp contrast to its low verbal one. When Zulu words are chanted by the ensemble of twenty-five, the effect is eloquent and magical; when the script falls back into Disneyspeak, it loses some of its lustre and its illusion of authenticity. As a result, the show, for all its excitement, is spectacular without being moving. "Get this thing off me!" the hornbill Zazu bleats at one point, when the curtain falls on him, leaving the unfunny bird unfortunately still conscious. "It looks like a shower curtain from the Guggenheim gift shop!" Where the production really loses ground, however, is in the traditional musical score, by Elton John and Tim Rice. The lyrics are a conventional thesaurus job: they manage to be simple without being fresh. "What did my brother have that I don't have?" asks Scar, in a lazy, unworthy borrowing of the Cowardly Lion's "What have they got that I ain't got?" And for dopiness on Broadway I don't think "Hakuna Matata"—a Swahili catchphrase that means "No Worries"—can be topped:

> Hakuna Matata! What a wonderful phrase!
> Hakuna Matata! Ain't no passing craze!

Finally, "The Lion King" turns the predatory anarchy of nature into a fairy tale of harmony—an ersatz Eden, where the lion doesn't lie down just with the lamb but with an entire zoo. Simba marries Nala (the excellent Heather Headley), and, in the musical's last beat, an heir is held before the kneeling, reverent kingdom. Paradise, once lost, is regained. Disney's world is one without shadow, and the production is in keeping with the spirit of the pleasure dome in which it is housed. "I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad," it says on the ceiling of the New Amsterdam's restored bar; the stage, whose proscenium arch is sculptured with peacocks, was built expressly for the escape of de-luxe spectacle. Florenz Ziegfeld mounted his lavish Follies here, and "The Lion King" seems to share Ziegfeld's commercial karma. Ziegfeld used women to eroticize wealth; Disney uses animals to sentimentalize it. The creators of "The Lion King" would probably call this the "circle of life"; I call it brilliant Business Art, and the hell with it. ♦

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PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Meredith Southard, must be received by Sunday, September 3rd. The finalists in the August 21st contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 18th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

“ ”

THE FINALISTS

“He's still orange.”
Eric Simkin, Torrance, Calif.

“I miss independent theatres.”
Thomas Kemeny, Austin, Texas

“Didn't we just see this one four years ago?”
Richard Thornton, Ravenswood, W.Va.

THE WINNING CAPTION

“They fly all this way just to say they ate in the Hamptons.”
Victor Chongchua, Honolulu, Hawaii

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Jhumpa Lahiri

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Paramore

"Weird Al" Yankovic

Ziwe

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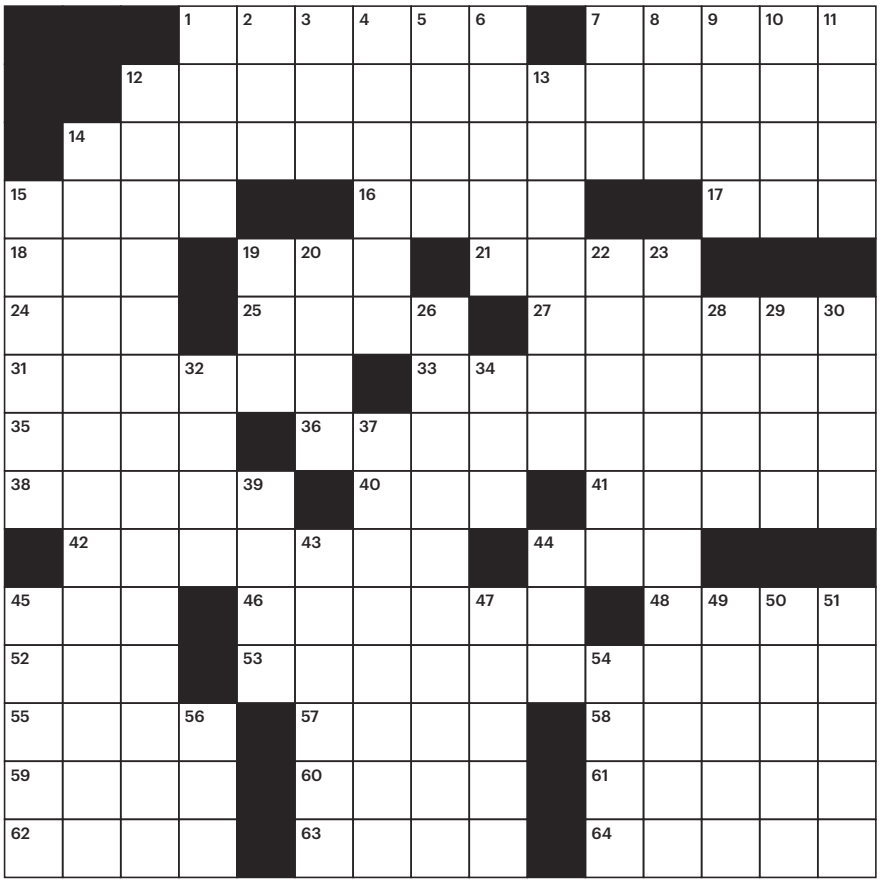
JAPANESE BREAKFAST BY HYUNWOO MIN; JHUMPA LAHIRI BY ELENA SEIBERT; SIMONE LEIGH BY SHANIQWA JARVIS; PARAMORE BY ZACHARY GRAY; WEIRD AL BY ROBYN VON SWANK; ZIWE BY MYLES LOFTIN/SHOWTIME

PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A moderately challenging puzzle.

BY BROOKE HUSIC



ACROSS

1 "Letter from Birmingham Jail" author's first name
7 "Understood!"
12 Bad Bunny and Chencho Corleone hit whose title can be translated as "I'll Behave Myself"
14 Princely accessory?
15 Black-and-white seabirds
16 The Big Board, briefly
17 First-responder initials
18 *Eine*, across the Rhine
19 Support
21 Lambs' moms
24 "The Chi" network, for short
25 Gamble
27 Migrants
31 Vehicle designed for sightseeing
33 Racing boat at the Quebec Winter Carnival
35 -trix relative
36 A Tribe Called Quest single whose title question is repeatedly answered in the affirmative
38 Word before strip or spray
40 Charitable grp. such as Landesa
41 Small ducks
42 Pokhara residents
44 Lunar New Year
45 Many were burned in the two-thousands
46 "You ___!"
48 Actor Malek
52 Window units: Abbr.
53 Making blanket agreements, say?
55 Agitate
57 "That's my cue!"
58 Paperless Post card, e.g.
59 Regularly updated YouTube channel, perhaps
60 This blows!
61 Mythological sorceress from Colchis
62 Two-time Boston Marathon champion Kiplagat
63 Snake's sound
64 Luges or qamutiiks

DOWN

1 Chaotic situation
2 Strava or Spotify, e.g.
3 Unfairly deprive
4 Fashion-journalism topics
5 "Just doing my best!"
6 Old ___
7 Dollop
8 Hydrogen's atomic number
9 Flag
10 Couple
11 Alternative to fries, familiarly
12 Neck stretch?
13 Mid-season rest period for a football team
14 Alternate between extremes
15 Author whose first novel was anonymously published under the byline "By a Lady"
19 Were present?
20 Texter's "Unless my memory fails . . ."
22 Light a fire under
23 Shuttle service?
26 London transit hub
28 Songwriter Paul after whom Lorelai's dog is named, on "Gilmore Girls"
29 Work hard
30 Matching top-and-skirt combos
32 Gather
34 A.F.L.-___ (group whose seal depicts a handshake)
37 Cantopop icon who once performed at the Hong Kong Coliseum for twenty-eight consecutive nights
39 Researchers' workplaces
43 Rival university of Lafayette
44 Neutral hue
45 Work on a tiki, say
47 Subtle notes
49 Put up with
50 Doled (out)
51 Things coming to a head?
54 Diamonds, for instance
56 Queens landing, briefly?

Solution to the previous puzzle:

M	U	D	D	L	E	■	■	■	O	L	D	I	S	H
A	P	R	I	O	R	I	■	A	V	I	A	N	C	A
S	T	O	P	G	A	P	■	B	A	B	Y	F	A	T
H	O	P	I	S	■	R	I	L	L	■	L	I	L	■
I	W	I	N	■	B	O	D	Y	■	H	I	D	E	S
E	N	T	■	D	E	M	O	■	H	E	L	E	N	A
■	■	■	K	E	H	I	N	D	E	W	I	L	E	Y
■	■	L	I	F	E	S	T	O	R	I	E	S	■	■
T	R	A	D	E	S	E	C	R	E	T	S	■	■	■
A	I	M	S	A	T	■	O	M	I	T	■	M	M	A
R	H	E	T	T	■	C	O	R	N	■	B	O	A	T
■	A	D	A	■	K	O	K	O	■	B	I	R	T	H
S	N	U	B	B	E	D	■	O	M	A	K	A	S	E
I	N	C	L	I	N	E	■	M	O	D	E	L	U	N
M	A	K	E	D	O	■	■	■	S	U	R	E	I	S

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at **newyorker.com/crossword**

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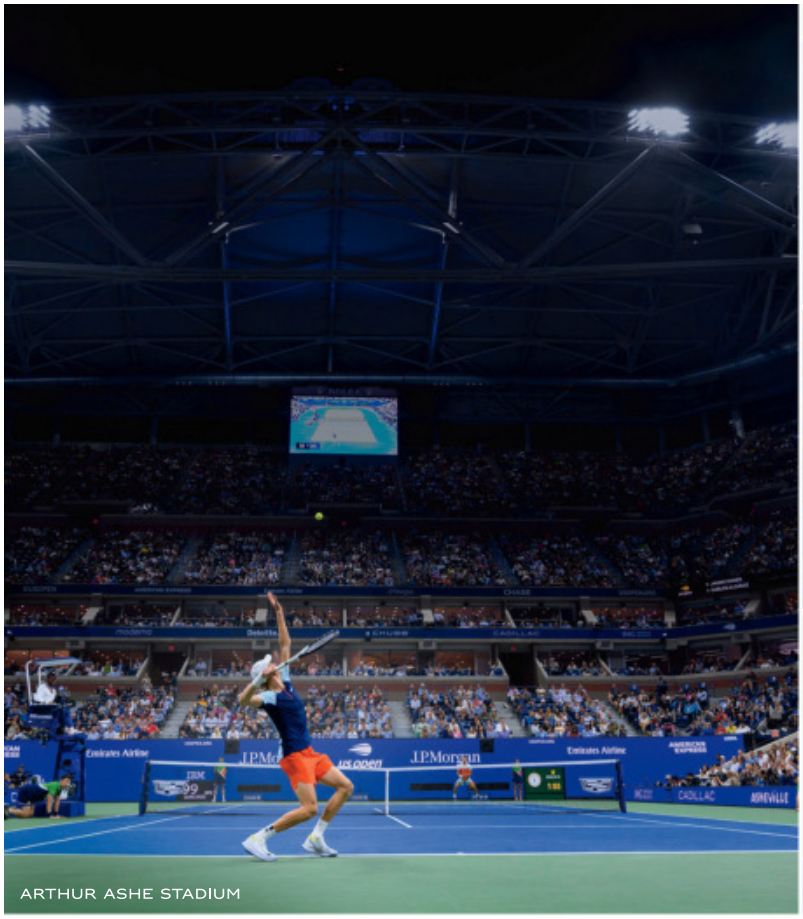
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